



Alsiarāt

THE IMAM HUSAYN
Conference Number



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Alserat

السرّاط

Six-monthly magazine

Vol. XII

Spring and Autumn, 1986

PAPERS FROM
THE IMAM HUSAYN CONFERENCE
LONDON, JULY 1984

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LONDON W2 4RL, ENGLAND.
TELEPHONE: 01-229 9040

First published in 1986

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ISBN 0-7103-0207-X

Produced in Great Britain by
The Muhammadi Trust
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Flat 1, 2 Orme Court
Bayswater Road
London W2 4RL
England

Distributed by
Routledge & Kegan Paul plc
14 Leicester Square
London WC2H 7PH
England

Typeset on a Monotype Lasercomp at
Oxford University Computing Service
Production Services by
Book Production Consultants, Cambs.
Printed in Great Britain by
The Thetford Press Ltd., Thetford, Norfolk.

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PAPERS FROM
THE
IMAM HUSAYN
CONFERENCE

LONDON, 6th-9th JULY 1984

ISBN No. 20922
Section..... Akh. / b. g. t
S.D. Class
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Status..... VG
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Muhammadi Trust wishes to express its gratitude to its patrons for their willing and kind support to make Imam Husayn Conference a success and this publication possible.

Because of the size of this volume it has been decided not to publish the Autumn issues 1985 and 1986 of this journal.



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PREFACE

THIS special number of *Al-Serāt* contains papers which were either presented at, or, in some cases, subsequently submitted in longer written form to, the International Conference on the Imam Ḥusayn held in London from the 6th to the 9th of July, 1984. The event was jointly organized by the Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre, Toronto, Canada, to commemorate the 1,400th *hijrī* anniversary of the birth of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the third Shī'ī Imam and grandson of Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, in 4 AH. Further details of the conference and speakers can be found in: Maryam Wellings, 'Report on the International Seminar on Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him', *Al-Serāt* X/2 (Autumn, 1984), 3-12.

The papers have been arranged thematically under three headings, and within these headings the order is alphabetical, according to author. Given both the variety of ways in which the subjects were treated in the papers themselves, and the different backgrounds of the contributors, only an absolute minimum of uniformity has been imposed by the editors, and, while it is hoped that consistency has been maintained within each paper, such consistency should not be looked for between them. Dates, for example, usually appear in their *hijrī* form, but in some places they are given according to the Christian calendar, or in both forms; it should be clear from the context which system is being used. Qur'ānic quotations have been given throughout in the form of, e.g., 2: 156, without further indication. The transliteration of Arabic names and terms follows the usual style of *Al-Serāt*, but in the case of other languages the editors have generally retained the transliterations given by each author.

The Muhammadi Trust would like to thank the contributors and organizers for their cooperation and assistance, and for their kind patience in awaiting the delayed publication of these papers. In particular, they would like to thank Mahmoud Ayoub and Azim Nanji for their help and advice in the preparation of this volume, and Lynda Clarke for her translation of Professor al-Janhānī's contribution.

INTRODUCTION

THIS publication of the proceedings of the conference to commemorate the 1400th *hijra* anniversary of the birth of the Sayyid al-Shuhadā', the Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, gives me the opportunity to say a few words of introduction about the Muhammadi Trust and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre for those whose do not already know about their operations and activities. The Muhammadi Trust was established in the United Kingdom in 1973, with its registered office in London, for the purpose, *inter alia*, of encouraging Islamic studies and disseminating knowledge of Islamic teachings; and its sister organization, the Muhammadi Islamic Centre of Canada, was set up in 1979, with the additional aim of awarding fellowships to students and scholars of Islam, and it has recently been registered under the name of the Muhammadi Islamic Foundation so as to allow it greater freedom and independence in its activities. Both organizations are anxious to strengthen unity among all Muslims, and, in particular, the youth. In pursuit of these objectives, the Trust has published a number of books and booklets in the English language. Some of these are translations of Arabic books on religious themes and topics, written by renowned scholars, and some are original works by scholars of international repute who have contributed to the study of Islam. The Trust also publishes a journal, *Al-Serāt*, which prints articles on religious topics by eminent writers. Those who are familiar with this journal know that the utmost importance is given to the quality and standard of the articles, and, at the same time, full freedom to express views is allowed the writers so as to permit the publication of articles propounding diverse views with which the publishers may not necessarily agree. This effort of the Trust is

directed towards the dissemination in English of knowledge concerning Islam in all its aspects.

Although a large body of literature on Islam exists in oriental languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, there is, in contrast, a dearth of such literature in English. Yet English is the only language with which our younger generation living in the Western world is familiar.

The diffusion and dissemination of knowledge is, according to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the religious duty of every Muslim, man or woman. The Prophet of Islam has enjoined us to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave. As Sa'di said,

پی علم چون شمع باید گداخت کہ بے علم خدا را کی توان شناخت

'to kindle the light of knowledge, one must necessarily melt like a candle; for how can one understand the divine Being without the glow of learning.'

I will now say just a few words as my humble tribute to the great Imam whose memory we have honoured in this conference. As a gem of the purest rays, serenest sparkles and reflected light, the life of the Imam Husayn mirrors the light of guidance through its every facet. It is no wonder that the Imam Husayn is looked upon as an ideal by all who believe in righteous causes, who believe that no sacrifice is too great for the achievement of a noble aim, who believe that death for a righteous cause is the very acme of noble living and far preferable to a life of ignominy and degradation based on compromising principles. How rightly Kawar Mehendra Singh Bedi has said:

جی کے مرنا تو سب کو آتا ہے مر کے جینا سکھادیا تو نے

'Everybody knows that after life there is death; but it is you [O Husayn] who has taught how to live by dying.' As Thomas Carlyle, in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, has put it: 'The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husayn and his followers were rigid believers in God; they illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husayn, despite his minority, marvels me.'

On the plains of Karbalā', Husayn showed what *jihād* stands for in Islamic terminology. He taught us, as no one else could have done, that it does not mean aggrandisement or the flamboyant display of valour which cries out: 'One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name.' He showed, as none else could have done, that to remain firm and steadfast in the hour of trial and tribulation, to surrender to the will of Allah with complete resignation is the zenith of martyrdom and *jihād*. He showed us that even the death and destruction of his dearest ones cannot deter a person from the performance of the appointed task, from the fulfillment of the ordained purpose, without the least hesitation, without the least demur, without a word or murmur of complaint. Who else but Husayn could have prayed to Allah for the salvation of Muslims without any rancour or bitterness under the dagger of the assassin. And all this with the utmost serenity and calm which comes from supreme resignation to the will of Allah and complete submission to His divine purpose. As Yagana says,

دوب کر پارا تر بیا اسلام آپ کیا جانیں کر بلا کیا ہے

'Only after drowning did Islam survive.' How is it possible for anyone to comprehend the meaning, message, and significance of Karbalā'?

Secretary to the Muhammadi Trust.

I

**THE LIFE OF THE IMAM ḤUSAYN
AS DEPICTED IN
MUSLIM LITERATURE**

RŪMĪ'S VIEW OF THE IMAM ḤUSAYN

William C. Chittick

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THE martyrdom of the Imam Ḥusayn can hardly be called a major theme of Rūmī's works; in over 50,000 couplets he refers to it less than twenty times. Nevertheless, these few lines are sufficient to suggest how the events of Karbalā' were viewed not only by Rūmī, this great representative of the Ṣūfī tradition, but also by his listeners, who constituted a pious cross-section of Islamic society.

The first thing one notes is that it was sufficient for Rūmī to mention one of three words to conjure up the image of Ḥusayn's martyrdom for his listeners: Ḥusayn, Karbalā', 'Āshūrā' Yazīd and Shimr had a similar evocative power. There was no need for Rūmī to describe the tragedy to a Muslim public, since everyone was already familiar with it; even among Sunnīs, it must have been part of the Islamic lore that was commonly called upon—especially in the context of popular preaching—to drive home points about good and evil, martyrdom, injustice, and similar themes. There is, of course, nothing surprising in this: scholars have often remarked on the indelible imprint left in the Muslim awareness by the Imam Ḥusayn's martyrdom. What should perhaps be noted is that the name Ḥusayn, along with the other words mentioned above, functioned to call up a whole set of images, just as, for example, it is sufficient for Rūmī to mention the name Abraham for his listeners to think of Nimrod and the fire that turned into a rosegarden; numerous other examples could also be cited.

One might ask about the sources of Rūmī's information concerning Ḥusayn, but this would be like asking where he learned about Islam. Nevertheless, one can say that among Ṣūfī poets that were known to have been read by Rūmī, Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131) employs the terms Ḥusayn and Karbalā' as poetic images in much the same manner that Rūmī does, while 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221) apparently does not refer to him except in the context of panegyrics on the Prophet and the first few caliphs (e.g., in his *Moṣībat-nāma*).

Sanā'ī invokes the name of the Imam Ḥusayn either to stress the necessity of suffering and tribulation in the practice of one's religion,¹ or to point out that the saints—the men of God—are those who have experienced the death of their individual selves.² In

¹ For example:

Until they turn away from happiness,
men of purity will not be able to step onto Muṣṭafā's carpet.
How should there be joy in religion's lane when,
for the sake of empire, blood ran down Ḥusayn's throat
at Karbalā'?

For the sake of a single 'Yes'
spoken by the spirit in eternity-without-beginning (7: 172),
The men of Yes (*bala*) must submit themselves to affliction (*balā'*)
until eternity-without-end.

[*Dīwān*, ed. Mudarris Raḍawī (Tehran, 1341/1962), pp. 40–41.]

Once you set out in this way,
your only provision will be annihilation,
even if you are an Abū Dharr or a Salmān.
If you are Ḥusayn,
you will see naught of the beauty of the bride's face
but daggers and arrows.

[*Dīwān*, p. 97]

This world is full of martyrs,
but where is a martyr like Ḥusayn at Karbalā'?

[*Dīwān*, p. 571.]

² For example:

Lift up your head in the garden of Verification,
so that in religion's lane you may see alive, group by group,
those who have been killed.
In one row you will see those killed with a blade like Ḥusayn,
in another those stricken with poison like Ḥasan.

[*Dīwān*, p. 485.]

Sanā'ī, since you have not been cut off from your own self,
how can you tell tales of Ḥusayn?

[*Dīwān*, p. 552.]

one instance he compares Ḥusayn, Yazīd, and Shimr to contrary forces working within the souls of men,³ and here, as in the first two instances, parallels are found in Rūmī's poetry.

For Rūmī, love for God is the heart and soul of Islam.⁴ Certainly the 'forms' (*sūrat*) of our acts and religious practices are important, but they are given values by the 'meanings' (*ma'nā*) which animate them. Thus, for example, when asked if anything is more important for Islamic practice than the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), Rūmī replies that the animating spirit (*jān*) of the prayer is better, just as faith (*īmān*) is more excellent. Faith must be continuous, whereas the prayer is performed at five different times during the day. The prayer can be omitted for a valid excuse, but faith can never be omitted. Faith without prayer has certain benefits, whereas prayer without faith is hypocritical and useless. Finally, faith is the same in all religions, while the form of prayer in each is different.⁵

Were Rūmī to be asked this question in more general terms, i.e., 'Is anything more important than the religion of Islam itself?', I think he would answer that love for God is so, since all these outward forms of ritual and devotion, all the teachings and practices that make up Islam, exist for the sake of that love. This is not to suggest that the 'forms' are without importance—far from it; the 'meaning'—love—cannot exist without its outward supports. But one must not fall into the error of thinking that the doctrines, practices, and outward forms are their own *raison d'être*, for 'prayer without faith is useless'. As Rūmī remarks:

If the exposition of meanings were sufficient,
the creation of the world would be vain and useless.

- ³ Religion is your Ḥusayn,
while desires and hopes are pigs and dogs—
yet you kill the first through thirst and feed these two.
How can you keep on cursing the wicked Yazīd and Shimr?
You are a Shimr and a Yazīd for your own Ḥusayn!

[*Dīwān*, p. 655.]

⁴ See W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī* (Albany N.Y., 1983), esp. pp. 194ff.

⁵ *Fthī mā fthī*, ed. B. Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 11, 32; cf. A. J. Arberry (trans.), *Discourses of Rūmī* (London, 1961), pp. 24–43.

If love for God were only thought and meaning,
the form of fasting and prayer would not exist.

The gifts that lovers exchange
are naught in relation to love except forms,

So that the gifts may give witness to the love hidden within.⁶

The forms of religion, then, are the necessary concomitants of the meaning of religion, which, for Rūmī, is love:

My religion is to live through love—
life through this spirit and body is my shame.⁷

The distinguishing feature of Rūmī's 'Religion of Love' is that it negates the reality of 'everything other than God' (*aghyār*) with the sword of the *shahāda*: 'There is no god but God.'

The joy and heartache of the lovers is He,
the wages and salary for their service He.

Were aught to be contemplated other than the Beloved,
how would that be Love? That would be idle infatuation.

Love is that flame which, when it blazes up,
burns away everything except the Beloved.

It drives home the sword of 'no god'
in order to slay other than God.

Consider carefully: after 'no god', what remains?

There remains 'but God'; the rest has gone.

Bravo, oh great, idol-burning Love!⁸

The chief 'idol' or 'other' that must be negated on the Path of Love is the seeker's own self: 'The mother of all idols is your own ego.'⁹

You are God's lover, and God is such that when He comes,
not a single hair of you will remain.

Before His glance a hundred like you are annihilated.

Is it that you are in love with your own negation, sir?

⁶ *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. R. J. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London, 1925-40), Bk I, vss. 2624-27 (all translations are my own).

⁷ *Mathnawī*, VI, 4059.

⁸ *Idem*, V, 586-590.

⁹ *Idem*, I, 772.

You are a shadow in love with the sun.
The sun comes, and the shadow is quickly naughted.¹⁰

The first attribute of the true lover, then, is that he must be ready to sacrifice himself for God.

O Love, pass the bitter judgement!
Cut me off from other than Thyself!

O torrent, you are roaring.
Roar! You take me to the Ocean.¹¹

But most men fear the torrent and flee the sword. They refuse to enter into the way of self-sacrifice, even though they are promised every manner of joy and felicity. Their faith is not strong enough to allow them to surrender their own wills and existences to God. Total readiness for martyrdom is the first quality of God's lover.

What does it mean to be Love's familiar?
Only to separate oneself from the heart's desire,
To become blood, to swallow down one's own blood,
and to wait at fidelity's door with the dogs.

The lover sacrifices himself—
for him death and removal are no different from staying.

On your way, O Moslem!
Be shielded by safety and strive at your piety,
For these martyrs have no patience without death—
they are in love with their own annihilation.

Flee if you want from affliction and fate—
their fear is to be without affliction.

Perform the fast on the recommended days and on 'Āshūrā'—
you cannot go to Karbalā'¹²

To be a human being in the true sense means to undertake the struggle against one's own ego.

The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual combat. The first spiritual combat they undertake in their quest is the killing of the ego and the

¹⁰ *Idem*, III, 4621-23.

¹¹ *Kullīyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr*, ed. B. Furūzānfar, 10 vols. (Tehran, 1336-46/1957-67), v. 35823.

¹² *Idem*, ghazal no. 2102.

abandonment of personal wishes and sensual desires. This is the Greater Holy War (*jihād-i akbar*).¹³

If Ḥusayn is a model worthy to be emulated, it is not because he was killed by villains—this goes without saying. What is truly noteworthy about his life was his victory in the Greater Holy War; only by virtue of his spiritual greatness do the events that led to his physical martyrdom have meaning. The emulation of him that is incumbent upon his followers is then engagement in the Greater Holy War.

Why do you sit there with your own thoughts?
If you are a man, go to the Beloved!

Do not say, 'Perhaps He does not want me,'
What business has a thirsty man with such words?

Does the moth think about the flames?
For Love's spirit, thinking is a disgrace.

When the warrior hears the sound of the drum,
at once he is worth ten thousand men!

You have heard the drum, so draw your sword without delay!
Your spirit is the sheath of the all-conquering Dhu'l-Faqār!

You are Ḥusayn at Karbalā', think not of water!

The only 'water' you will see today is a sword of the first water!¹⁴

But in order to attain the Kingdom of Love a man must first suffer the pain of separation from his Beloved. For the more he understands the nature of his goal, the more he will understand the depth of his own inadequacy.

Whoever is more awake has greater pain,
whoever is more aware has a yellower face.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the pain that the lover suffers always attracts him toward the object of his love.

Every heartache and suffering that enters your body and heart
pulls you by the ear to the Promised Abode.¹⁶

¹³ *Fṭhī mā fṭhī*, p. 130; *Discourses*, pp. 140–41.

¹⁴ *Kulliyāt*, vss. 3656–62.

¹⁵ *Mathnawī*, I, 629.

¹⁶ *Kulliyāt*, vs. 35487.

The reason for this is clear:

Your inward nature is full of dust from the veil of 'I-ness',
and that dust will not leave you all at once.

With every cruelty and every blow,
it departs little by little from the heart's face,
sometimes in sleep and sometimes in wakefulness.¹⁷

Eventually the pain and suffering of love will lead to the death of the ego and rebirth in God.

Night died and came to life, for there is life after death:
O heartache, kill me! For I am Ḥusayn, you are Yazīd.¹⁸

Or again,

O Murtaḍā of Love! Shams al-Dīn of Tabrīz—look at me!
I am like Ḥusayn, sitting in my own blood,
or like Ḥasan, drinking down poison.¹⁹

Again:

Whoever has my fire wears my robe—
he has a wound like Ḥusayn, a cup like Ḥasan.²⁰

In short, it is only through the suffering and tribulation of the spiritual journey as exemplified in the outward world by the trials of the Imam Ḥusayn and his family that man can attain the perfection for which he was created. Then, however, he has every right to speak of the joy and felicity of union with God. If Rūmī, in one passage of the *Mathnawī* (VI 777–805), is able to poke fun at the Shī'a of Aleppo for their celebration of 'Āshūrā',²¹ it is precisely

¹⁷ *Idem*, vss. 12078–79.

¹⁸ *Idem*, vs. 9206.

¹⁹ *Idem*, vs. 20517.

²⁰ *Idem*, vs. 6358.

²¹ On the day of 'Āshūrā'
all the people of Aleppo gather at the Antioch gate
until nightfall.
Men and women—
a great congregation—
mourn the family of the Prophet.
On 'Āshūrā'
the Shī'a wail and lament
with tears for Karbalā' . . .

because here he is looking at the good news of joy and union which are announced by the Imam's spiritual victory and which are the meaning beyond the form of his outward suffering:

The spirit of a sultan has escaped from a prison.
Why should we tear our clothes and bite our fingers?

Since he was the king of religion,
his breaking of the bonds was a time of joy,
For he sped toward the pavilions of good fortune
and threw off his fetters and chains.²²

In conclusion, let me quote two more of Rūmī's ghazals, which can serve to summarize the Imam Ḥusayn's significance as pictured in Rūmī's works:

Where are you, martyrs of God,
you who have sought affliction
on the plain of Karbalā'?

A stranger, a poet,
arrived at Aleppo on the day of 'Āshūrā'
and heard all that lamentation. . . .
He went along asking questions in his search:
'What is this sorrow?
For whom are you mourning? . . .'
Someone said to him,
'Hey, are you mad? Are you not a Shī'ite?
Are you an enemy of the Family?
'Don't you know that it is the day of 'Āshūrā',
a day of mourning
for a soul who was greater than a generation? . . .'

The poet replied,
'True, but where are the days of Yazīd?
When did this tragedy occur!
How long the news has taken to reach you here!
The eyes of the blind have seen that loss!
The ears of the deaf have heard that story!
Have you been asleep until now
that you have just begun to tear your clothes in mourning?
Then mourn for yourselves, oh sleepers,
for this heavy sleep of yours is a terrible death!
The spirit of a sultan . . .'

²² *Mathnawī*, VI, 797-99.

Outwardly made a martyr, in the unseen world it has gained life—
in the eyes of the enemy it is a prisoner,
in the Void, a king,

Dwelling in the paradise of union with the Friend,
it has been delivered from the depths of hunger's prison
and freed from the cheap and the dear.

Were the root of its tree not well nourished in the Unseen,
why are the blossoms of its union open for all to see?

Silence! Speak from the direction of your awareness.
For the Universal Intellect is asking you,
'Will you not understand?' (2: 44, etc.).²⁴

²⁴ *Idem*, ghazal no. 230.

ELEGY (*MARTHĪYA*) ON ḤUSAYN: ARABIC AND PERSIAN

L. Clarke

University of Toronto

I propose to give here an account neither of the development, nor of the themes, of the elegy on Ḥusayn—in Arabic or Persian—nor of the outstanding poets of elegy—the literature in both these languages is too vast for that, and spread out over too great a period. Rather, I would like to give some idea of the place of these *marāthī* in literary and religious tradition, while giving in translation some examples of elegy on Ḥusayn which should serve for those unfamiliar with these languages to form an idea of the beauty and effectiveness of this type of poetry.

I should warn English-speakers that my translations, in one essential respect, do not bear much resemblance to the originals. The Arabic and Persian poetical traditions, at least until very recently (only a few decades ago), required adherence to strict rhyme patterns—often monorhyme—and strict quantitative metre. These things are not only nearly impossible to reproduce in our English language, but also undesirable. It is necessary to imagine that the examples I give had in their original a very regular rhythm, a rhythm which could also be important for ritual purposes, for instance, in religious processions. If the conceits used are sometimes also a little difficult for us to understand immediately, the ideas expressed, and the effect, are, I think, universal.

The tradition of elegiac poetry known in Arabic as *marthīya* had its roots, as regards themes as well as form, in pre-Islamic times.

The Arabic elegy, in the sometimes lengthy monorhyme *qaṣīda* form, was like all pre-Islamic poetry highly conventionalized. The virtues of the deceased and the loss of the mourner are described, which then provides an opportunity to dwell on the pathos of this transitory life in the face of fate, always unalterable. Often the mourner curses the enemy and calls for vengeance. While the pre-Islamic elegy was conventionalized, it was also highly specific, or occasional: reflections on mortality only serve to frame a threnodic tribute to a specified personality.

If we express '*marthīya*' as 'elegy', then it should be kept in mind that what we mean is not the elegy of Western tradition, which may designate any poem of a subjective kind, and one quite generally connected with the question of mortality. Most of even the earliest forms of the Greek elegiac couplet (from which the Latin and then Western languages take the genre and the name) do not display exclusively themes of death or loss.

If I bring up this point—which may seem somewhat distant from the question of elegy on Ḥusayn in Arabic and Persian—it is to emphasize that the literature of *marāthī* has but weak parallels in Western tradition. More particularly, it is not paralleled in Western Christian tradition, despite an extensive martyrology. Some of the social and attendant historical factors in this contrasting development may be surmised: for one thing, the influence of poetic tradition has been comparatively much stronger among the Arab-speaking peoples and among the once much wider circle of Persian speakers than in the West. What is of relevance here is that it has clearly been the event of Karbalā' which allowed this pre-Islamic Arabic tradition to continue into Islamic times and take its central place in the languages of the Islamic tradition. Any elegy (in the restricted sense in which we are speaking here) may strike a universal note—in fact that is one of the requirements of an elegy—but very few examples tend to survive as poetry or as something which would continue to evoke deep emotion. Practically our whole tradition of funeral elegy in English, for example, seems to be quite dead, in the poetical sense. In contrast to this, we have the tradition of Ḥusayn and those martyred with him: the sacrifice of Ḥusayn has provided a vital and meaningful subject for authors (both Shī'ī and Sunnī) for all of fourteen centuries (and into the

future, God willing). Thus we see that even in Arabic, although the strong tradition of secular elegy continued into this century, that too has declined with other forms and themes considered 'artificial' by modern movements, while *marthīya* on Ḥusayn and the other martyrs of Karbalā' continues in both formal and popular language.

Alongside this, the event of Karbalā' has provided a continuing ritual context for elegiac poetry. The *marthīya* in pre-Islamic times has a ritual function as a lamentation (*nawh*), often recited by women (and the best of its earliest practitioners known to us were women). Not only would the listener be invited to dwell in the virtues of the deceased, but the pathos of the situation was also revealed, and it may be assumed that those present were then moved to weep. Some of the earliest examples we have of *marthīya* on Ḥusayn are in fact simple poems of this type: lamentations by his wives and daughters. This piece attributed to Rabāb, beloved wife of Ḥusayn, is particularly moving. Rabāb said:

He who was a light, shining, is murdered;
Murdered in Karbalā', and unburied.
Descendant of the Prophet, may God reward you well;
May you be spared judgement on the day when deeds are
weighed:
For you were to me as a mountain, solid, in which I could
take refuge;
And you treated us always with kindness,¹ and according
to religion.
O who shall speak now for the orphans, for the petitioners;
By whom shall all these wretched be protected, in whom
shall they take refuge?
I swear by God, never will I wish to exchange marriage
with you for another;
No, not until I am covered; covered in the grave.

And on another occasion Rabāb said:

O Ḥusayn! Never shall I forget Ḥusayn!
Pierced by the spears of his enemies,

¹ *bī 'l-rahm*: also, 'as one related to you'.

He whom they abandoned, in Karbalā',
 May God now never water the plains of
 Karbalā'!²

And regardless of how well attested these pieces of elegy are as literary remains, I think we would have to say that the beauty and deep feeling here has something of the force of memory to testify to their authenticity. In many later elegies on Ḥusayn, the lament is put into the mouths of females of his family—Fāṭima, for instance, or Zaynab—and this recalls the pre-Islamic elegy.

In the Umayyad period poets were invited to compose laudations (*madh*) and *marāthī* for the rituals of the gatherings (*majālis*) of the noble members of the family of the Prophet. This narration concerning the sixth Imam shows the place of *marāthī* in these gatherings:

Ja'far b. 'Alfān came to al-Ṣādiq's residence and seated himself next to him, upon which the Imam said, 'Ja'far, I have been told that you recite poetry for Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, and that you do it well.' 'Yes, and may God make me a sacrifice for you!' replied the poet. 'Recite, then', said al-Ṣādiq, and Ja'far recited these verses:

He who weeps for Ḥusayn might well weep for Islam
 itself—

For the principles of Islam have been destroyed, and
 used unlawfully:

On the day when Ḥusayn became the target of spears,
 When swords drank from him, busy with their work,
 And corpses, scattered, were abandoned in the desert.
 Great birds hovering over by night and by day. . . .

And the Imam Ṣādiq wept and those around him with him, until his face and beard were covered with tears. Then he said, 'By God, Ja'far, the angels closest to God are witness here and they hear your words; they have wept as we have, and more. . . .'³

At the end of the 'Abbāsid period, the reciter in these commemorative sessions was still known as a *nā'iḥ*—a lamenter, or mourner.⁴

² Muḥammad Jawād Maghniya, *Adab al-Taff aw Shu'arā' al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut, 1388/1969), I, 61.

³ Hibat al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Shahristānī, *Nahdat al-Ḥusayn* (Karbalā', 1388/1969), p. 154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

These *marāthī*, then, provided the germ for early gatherings of partisans of the House of the Prophet; they may also then be seen as the origin or earliest form of the *ta'zīya* as it is known today among Shī'ī peoples. The literary forms known as *ta'zīya* and *marthīya* in Arabic are related, the *ta'zīya* being a kind of extended lamentation which is also intended to comfort the hearer in the face of calamity, as the root meaning of the Arabic—'comforting'—suggests.⁵ The 'ritual context' for elegy on Ḥusayn continues to be provided today not only by the developed *ta'zīya*, but also by various other gatherings within the ten days of Muḥarram in which *marāthī* are recited. In the Shī'ī area of Lebanon, for instance, there are many such gatherings held, and in both the Arabic- and Persian-speaking world gatherings are held exclusively for women.⁶

It was inevitable that once the force of memory receded, themes had to be introduced into elegy on Ḥusayn which would have the desired effect on the hearer by bringing forward the significance of his martyrdom; thus the elegy is linked with the issues surrounding his martyrdom. In the example we have already given by the poet Ja'far ibn 'Affān al-Tā'ī (d. 150), Islam itself is put in the position of a martyr. This *marthīya* of the *imām* al-Shāfi'ī introduces, after protestations of personal sorrow, and the image of the martyr, his declaration of love for the House of the Prophet overall. The *imām* Shāfi'ī said:

⁵ The *K. al-Ta'zī wa al-Marāthī* of Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 282) explains the meaning of *ta'zīya* and gives examples (ed. Muḥammad al-Dībājī [Damascus, 1396/1976], pp. 4ff).

⁶ Waddāh Sharāra, *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban-Sud* (Beirut, 1968), pp. 43ff. As to the Arab 'Āshūrā' representation or *ta'zīya*, it seems that it has until now received too little attention. It may be that the actual dramatic form owes much to Iranian, and largely Ṣafavid, origins—for instance, it is received knowledge among the inhabitants of the chiefly Shī'ī town of Nabatiya in South Lebanon that it was Iranian immigrants at the beginning of the century who gave the *ta'zīya* there (the mere playing of which recently caused the occupying forces to fire on the participants) its present form. However, since the commemorative session itself began, of course, as an Arabic tradition, it would seem worthwhile to examine Arabic-language *ta'zīya* separately for Arabic antecedents to the Persian.

My heart sighed, for my innermost being was in
 dejection;
 Sleep no longer came, and sleeplessness was
 bewildering.
 O who shall be the bearer of a message from me to
 Husayn—
 (Though the hearts and minds of some may
 disapprove!)

Slaughtered, though without sin himself,
 His shirt as if dyed through with crimson.
 Now the sword itself wails, and the spear shrieks,
 And the horse which once only whinnied, laments.
 The world quaked for the sake of the Family of
 Muḥammad;
 For their sake, the solid mountains might have
 melted away.

Heavenly bodies sunk, the stars trembled,
 Oh veils were torn, and breasts were rent!
 He who asks blessing for the one sent from the Tribe of
 Hāshim,
 But attacks his sons—truly, that is strange!
 And if my sin is love of the Family of Muḥammad:
 Then that is a sin which I do not repent.⁷

This *qaṣīda* of the *imām* Shāfi'ī is also notable in that it is, of course, a Sunnī production; the fact that he composed other such elegies is well attested, and apparently many other Shāfi'ītes (and Ḥanafites) in this early period did the same.⁸ However, even the attestation by such a person as the *imām* Shāfi'ī of his love for the Family of the Prophet left him open in those dangerous times to accusations of 'unorthodoxy', as the following lines attributed to him suggest. The *imām* Shāfi'ī said:

They said, 'You are a Rāfiḍī!', and I said, 'But no—
 Nor is my religion nor are my beliefs of that kind. . . .

⁷ *Adab al-Taff*, I, 214.

⁸ Dhahīb Allāh Safā, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt dar Īrān* (Tehran, 2536), II, 195.

'But if love of the viceregent of God be Rāfiḏism—
Then I am the most Rāfiḏī of the servants of God!'⁹

Continuing on the subject of 'Sunnī—or perhaps we should say 'non-Shī'ī—elegy about Ḥusayn, here is a strong piece from the *Ḥadiqat al-Ḥaqīqa* or 'Garden of Truth' of Sanā'ī, as a Persian example from the early twelfth century. I have abridged it in translation by about half; it is given the title 'Concerning Karbalā', and the fragrant air of that most glorious place of martyrdom'. Sanā'ī says:

How excellent Karbalā'! and that honour it received,
Which brought to mankind the odour of Paradise as if
on a breeze;
And that body, headless, lying in clay and dust,
And those precious ones, hearts rent by the sword.
And that elect of all the world, murdered,
His body smeared with earth and blood;
And those great oppressors, those doers of evil,
Persistent in the evil they do.
The sanctity of religion and the Family of the Prophet
Are both borne away, both by ignorance and inanity;
Swords are red like precious ruby with the blood of
Ḥusayn—
What disgrace in the world worse than this!
And Muṣṭafā, his garments all torn,
And 'Alī, tears of blood raining from his eyes.
A whole world has become insolent in its cruelty;
The cunning fox has become a roaring lion.
But still unbelievers at the start of the battle,
Were reminded of the stroke of Dhū 'l-Fiqr.
Yes, from Ḥusayn they sought satisfaction for their
rancour—but that was not to be;
They had to be content with their own malice and
disgrace.
And know that any who speak ill of those dogs [those
murderers of Ḥusayn]
Will be kings in the world to come!¹⁰

⁹ *Adab al-Ṭaff*, I, 217.

¹⁰ *Ḥadiqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, ed. Mudarrisī Razavī (Tehran, 1950), pp. 270-271.

In Arabic poems on Ḥusayn, the elegy—the *marthīya* proper—becomes very soon only part of a larger developed narrative in which the deeds and nobility of the martyrs of Karbalā' are described. This development of narrative can be seen already in the poetry of Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī (d. 246) and in the large body of poetry composed by Ibn Ḥammād al-'Abdī (end of the 4th cent.). However, the *marthīya* form can still be seen intact within these longer *qaṣīdas*, and the lament for Ḥusayn still provides the emotional high point; it is often placed at the beginning of the composition. As another example from this early period we give a part of this well known elegy by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 406), which he is said to have extemporized on the spot at Karbalā'. In this *qaṣīda* al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā pictures Ḥusayn calling out to his ancestors for aid, but they do not respond; the poet even seems to reproach God for the deaths of the martyrs. In fact, the 'reproach' is a common theme in elegy on Ḥusayn—of the hearer, of the dead relatives of the martyr, or even of God. The elegy for Ḥusayn then turns into a lament for all the Imams supposed to have been martyred, and ends with a call for revenge from the Prophet himself.

O Karbalā'! Ever is your name sorrow (*karb*) and tragedy
(*balā*)!

O what you brought upon the family of Muṣṭafā!

How much blood flowed upon your soil when they fell,
 And how many tears were shed there!

And how many a noble horse there was, weeping, its tears
coursing,

Its cheek next to one perished of thirst,

Wiping the dust off its hooves
 On the stain of a throat covered in blood!

These guests came to a barren plain,
 And there was no food to be served them;

Nor did they taste water, until they gathered
 At the edge of the sword, and the spring of death.

O murdered one, who struggled with death,
 Without uttering an insult, without killing anyone!

And they washed him only with his own blood, shed by
spears;

Shrouded him only with a shroud of dust.

Exhausted, he calls, while there is no help for him,

In the name of his beneficent father, and his grandfather
Muṣṭafā,

And in the name of a mother for whom God has raised a
standard,

Not found among all the women of humankind.

And what father, what grandfather does he call!

O grandfather, grandfather, help me, O father!

O Messenger of God, O Fāṭima,

O Prince of the Faithful, 'Alī, Murtaḍā!

How would God not hasten for their sakes,

To cause the earth to heave, the sky to rain stones!

And O Imams, mountains of the earth, most great, most
high;

O moons of this earth, shining, brilliant!

The disaster which befell you

Brought to us deep grief and weeping, never ending.

I know that sorrow for you is not to be forgotten, nor grief
for your sake comforted,

Though ages may pass;

For much time has passed since your deaths, and continues
to pass,

Yet neither has grief abated, nor tears.

How far are you, O Imams, from him who hoped to
achieve by you,

With the Apostle of God, victory and salvation;

On the day of the Great Encounter, when the Apostle

Will turn his face from those gathered, and say:

(Speaking to God against them—

And how could a generation thus accused prosper?)

'O Lord, on this day I am enemy to them;

I come as one wronged, and this is the day to judge.¹¹

¹¹ *Adab al-Taff*, II, 206-208.

The great impetus for the vast literature of elegy and dirge for Husayn in the Persian language—a literature which is now much larger than the Arabic, which includes a much greater element of elegy on the other martyrs of Karbalā', and which has many more forms and recognized ritual uses than in the Arabic tradition—came with the establishment of the Šafavid dynasty and the consequent consolidation for Shī'ism of the larger part of the Persian-speaking world. Here as an example from the beginning of the Šafavid period, is an elegiac *qaṣīda* (abridged in translation) by Muḥtasham-i Kāshānī, a favourite court poet. It shows some of the typical themes and imagery of the Persian genre, as well as imaginative expressions of the favourite elegiac theme of what later came to be known in Europe as 'pathetic fallacy'. Kāshānī says:

The name of this land full of tragedy (*balā'*) is Karbalā'.

O pitiless heart, where is your sigh of burning sorrow to burn
the heavens?

This desert is the place of the murder of a lord who died athirst.

O tongue, it is the time for lamentation; O eye, it is time to
weep!

This space still bears the mark of the sighs of ones wronged—

So if the sky is become black through the smoke of our sighs, it
is fitting.

This spot which today is covered by the canopies of the bubbles of
our tears,

Was once the place where the tents of the People of the House
were set up.

Here the ship of Husayn's life foundered in disaster;

Then why is the ocean of our tears, in such a maelstrom,
stormless?

Behold that dome filled with light from near and far;

Its world-illuminating rays show the way to those gone
astray.

Behold a grave most illumined, before which

The casket of the horizons with its hundred thousand petals and
precious stones is as without value.

Behold beneath the earth, the cypress of the garden of the
Prophet,

For sorrow of whom the sky is arched, bent over.¹²

¹² The cypress in Persian poetry is thought of metaphorically as a possessor of

Behold, one clotted with blood, the tree of roses in the garden of
Fāṭima, a woman pure.

For whose defeat of whom the garments of the houris are rent
like the rose.

This is the lamp to the eyes of mankind, and now by the sword of
oppression,

Extinguished, as though merely a candle—a naked body, the
head separated from the rest.

This is the joy of Zahrā's breast, and now by horses' hooves

His breast so full of wisdom trampled from all sides by tragedy
(*balā'*).

This is Husayn, son of 'Alī, beloved of the Prophet—

Now pierced through by the blade of oppression at the hand of
his murderer Sinān.¹³

Set foot with reverence in this place of martyrdom, for its carpet
most illumed,

Is anemone colour with blood from the head of him who was
the light of the eyes of 'Alī, Muṭṭadā.

And even if the eye of a friend should not weep bitterly with
sorrow,

Still the cry 'O sorrow!' would be upon the tongues of enemies,
a cry of regret!

Now night appears from the setting of the sun, for on the roof of
the horizons,

The black standard of the People of the Cloak falls from the
shoulder of ever-revolving time—

O viceregent of God, I, Muḥtasham, the beggar at your
threshold,

Stand at the door of helplessness, empty, and empty-handed.

O how long since I tore my heart from my homeland for your
sake!

And now after the long road it has taken, it enters in this
palace.

fair stature. Here the tall-standing and erect cypress is brought down below the ground, and is also in contrast to the sky, bent over in sorrow (the sky is thought of as an arc or dome).

¹³ Or: 'the spear of the son of man', apparently implying the guilt of all humankind. Sinān b. Anos al-Nakh'ī, according to some accounts, was the murderer of Husayn.

Now the suppliant hand of my heart is raised in wretchedness to
the sky,

And that which it seeks depends on your favour.

And though, O Husayn, through the desires of the self, that lover
of sin,

My heart sits at the banquet of sin, and astride the horse of
error—

Yet since the plain of Karbalā' is become covered with dust, it
would be fit

If you were to take away from this heart, the dust of sin.¹⁴

Muḥtasham's *tarkīb-band*, a long strophic poem of twelve parts, is much more well known than any other of his numerous elegies on Husayn, and was imitated for centuries after him. Each strophe ends with a refrain, which is particularly effective in elegy. As an example of a modern *tarkīb-band*, here is one strophe taken from a piece by a very popular contemporary poet, Anṣārī, 'Poet of the House of the Prophet'. It seems that the poet may have been inspired not only by the differing circumstances surrounding the martyrdoms of 'Alī and Husayn, but by the contrast between Najaf and Karbalā' as well (Najaf is fairly well watered, but Karbalā' is like a desert).

O breeze of morning, take to 'Alī these words of the poet
Anṣārī;

Say: Husayn is fallen. Rise, then, go and see:

To Karbalā' from Najaf where you lie,

His body in a hundred pieces pierced by the lance, the
dagger, the sword.

O 'Alī! See who was once the light of your eyes,

Now the enemy around him like eyelashes around the
eye;

And here you lie, in pleasant repose with Adam and Noah,
at rest

While Husayn has as his resting place the burning sand
of Karbalā'!

Although you were made stranger to yourself by the stroke
of the sword,

¹⁴ *Divān-i Muḥtasham*, ed. M. Gurgānī (Tehran, 1344/1965), pp. 299-300.

Around you were both stranger and kin, with refresh-
 ment and sweets;
 While the body of your Husayn is rent the whole length
 with wounds.
 And would you know the number of those wounds?
 They are as many as the stars!
 Wherever you turned your gaze, there stood a friend to see,
 While Husayn's eye falls only on the enemy.
 'Alī, when you gave your life, your family was there
 beside,
 But there on a desert plain far from daughter or sister
 Husayn dies.
 For you the Faithful Spirit, Gabriel, brought a shroud
 from heaven,
 But Husayn fell there on the earth without ablution,
 without shroud!
 'Alī, since Husayn in the last hour took your head on his
 lap to lie,
 As kindness in return, then, lay his head on your lap 'til
 he dies.¹⁵

As an example of modern Arabic elegy in the traditional style, here is a piece from the great Lebanese Shī'ī scholar Muḥsin al-Amīn al-Āmilī, taken from a collection of elegies he has made of his own and others' poems. Al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn died only recently; it should be mentioned that he was active not only in Shī'ī scholarship and especially biography, but also in Sunnī-Shī'ī *taqrīb* or rapprochement. This *qaṣīda*, in a lightweight metre and a simple style, was composed in 1353/1934-5 while the author was travelling in Iraq and Iran, and it might not be too much to see some allusions to the political situation of those areas in certain lines. Al-Sayyid al-Amīn says:

O Karbalā', you have brought upon us great sorrow;
 You have excited sadness and grief.
 Now the eye must let its tears flow
 To water the grave of one who died thirsty in al-Ṭaff.

¹⁵ *Dīvān-i Anṣārī*, ed. A. Uşūlī (Qum, 1342/1963), pp. 343-344.

Glory, O Abū Faḍl, brother of Ḥusayn, for your ways have
become

A lesson to the courageous; an example to the brave.

Your way, yes *this* is the way of brothers

(May the one not live who betrays his brother!)

Glory to you, O tribe of Hāshim, for you offered your lives
freely

And your lives were sacrifice for the religion of God.

On that day you bought glory dearly:

Your precious lives were the price of glory!

You gave your lives for little for the sake of the religion of
Mustafā, and by this

The measure of your lives is become more precious
still—and who can equal your deeds after this?

You left your family and your children, despite your love
for them;

And you exchanged them for the maidens and the youths
of Paradise.

Though kings set on their heads crowns of gold,

Yet it is glory which you wear as your crown.

No sword or spear is truly unsheathed, after you;

No, after your deeds, no weapon has found a hand
worthy!

Glory itself submitted to your loftiness, it dared not come
near;

And others never attained your station; they did not even
approach it.

In excellence all mankind is below you, without
exception,

And they who called you low, have ended in shame.¹⁵

Elegy for Ḥusayn continues in Arabic in popular or dialect form as well, proof of the power of the martyr to enter into and affect the life of the common people. The popular strophic form in Lebanese dialect known as *zajal* is used for many subjects, including political and nationalistic themes. Most villages (Muslim and non-Muslim) have their own *zajal* poet. A collection of some *zajal* compositions

¹⁵ *Al-Durr al-Naḍīd fī Marāthī al-Sibī al-Shahīd* (Karbala', n.d.), pp. 339-340.

The tears of your love flowed forth, O Husayn,
His death overcame you with grief.
And your heart burst forth with tears,
The world, once wide, seemed as if it had become
narrow:
O Husayn, O Husayn!¹⁷

¹⁷ Anatoly Kovalenko, *Le Martyre de Husayn dans la poésie populaire d'Iraq* (Genève, 1979), pp. 220-222.

KARBALĀ' AND ḤUSAYN IN LITERATURE

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I still remember the deep impression which the first Persian poem I ever read in connection with the tragic events of Karbalā' left on me. It was Qaani's elegy which begins with the words:

What is raining? Blood.

Who? The eyes.

How? Day and night.

Why? From grief.

Grief for whom? Grief for the king of Karbalā'

This poem, in its marvellous style of question and answer, conveys much of the dramatic events and of the feelings a pious Muslim experiences when thinking of the martyrdom of the Prophet's beloved grandson at the hands of the Umayyad troops.

The theme of suffering and martyrdom occupies a central rôle in the history of religion from the earliest time. Already, in the myths of the ancient Near East, we hear of the hero who is slain but whose death, then, guarantees the revival of life: the names of Attis and Osiris from the Babylonian and Egyptian traditions respectively are the best examples for the insight of ancient people that without death there can be no continuation of life, and that the blood shed for a sacred cause is more precious than anything else. Sacrifices are a means for reaching higher and loftier stages of life; to give away parts of one's fortune, or to sacrifice members of one's family enhances one's religious standing; the Biblical and Qur'anic

story of Abraham who so deeply trusted in God that he, without questioning, was willing to sacrifice his only son, points to the importance of such sacrifice. Iqbal was certainly right when he combined, in a well known poem in *Bāl-i Jibrīl* (1936), the sacrifice of Ismail and the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, both of which make up the beginning and the end of the story of the Ka'ba.

Taking into account the importance of sacrifice and suffering for the development of man, it is not surprising that Islamic history has given a central place to the death on the battlefield of the Prophet's beloved grandson Ḥusayn, and has often combined with that event the death by poison of his elder brother Ḥasan—in popular literature we frequently find both Ḥasan and Ḥusayn represented as participating in the battle of Karbalā', which is historically wrong, but psychologically correct.

It is not the place here to discuss the development of the whole genre of *marthīya* and *ta'zīya* poetry in the Persian and Indo-Persian world, or in the popular Turkish tradition. But it is interesting to cast a glance at some verses in the Eastern Islamic tradition which express predominantly the Sunni poets' concern with the fate of Ḥusayn, and echo, at the same time, the tendency of the Sūfīs to see in him a model of the suffering which is so central for the growth of the soul.

The name of Ḥusayn appears several times in the work of the first great Sūfī poet of Iran, Sanā'ī (d. 1131). Here, the name of the martyred hero can be found now and then in connection with bravery and selflessness, and Sanā'ī sees him as the prototype of the *shahīd*, higher and more important than all the other *shahīds* who are and have been in the world:

Your religion is your Ḥusayn, greed and wish are your pigs and
dogs—

You kill the one, thirsty, and nourish the other two.

[*Dīvān*, p. 655]

This means that man has sunk to such a lowly state that he thinks only of his selfish purposes and wishes and does everything to fondle the material aspects of his life, while his religion, the spiritual side of his life, is left without nourishment, withering away, just like Ḥusayn and the martyrs of Karbalā' were killed after

nobody had cared to give them water in the desert. This powerful idea is echoed in other verses, both in the *Dīvān* and in the *Ḥadiqāt al-Ḥaqīqa*; but one has to be careful in one's assessment of the long praise of Ḥusayn and the description of Karbalā' as found in the *Ḥadiqa*, as they are apparently absent from the oldest manuscripts of the work, and may have been inserted at some later point. This, however, does not concern us here. For the name of the hero, Ḥusayn, is found in one of the central poems of Sanā'ī's *Dīvān*, in which the poet describes in grand images the development of man and the long periods of suffering which are required for the growth of everything that aspires to perfection. It is here that he sees in the 'street of religion' those martyrs who were dead and are alive, those killed by the sword like Ḥusayn, those murdered by poison like Ḥasan (*Dīvān* 485).

The tendency to see Ḥusayn as the model of martyrdom and bravery continues, of course, in the poetry written after Sanā'ī by Persian and Turkish mystics, and of special interest is one line in the *Dīvān* of 'Attār (nr. 376) in which he calls the novice on the path to proceed and go towards the goal, addressing him:

Be either a Ḥusayn or a Maṣṣūr.

That is, Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, the arch-martyr of mystical Islam, who was cruelly executed in Baghdad in 922. He, like his namesake Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, becomes a model for the Sūfī; he is the suffering lover, and in quite a number of Sūfī poems his name appears alongside that of Ḥusayn: both were enamoured by God, both sacrificed themselves on the Path of divine love, both are therefore the ideal lovers of God whom the pious should strive to emulate. Ghalīb skillfully alludes to this combination in his *tawḥīd qaṣīda*:

God has kept the ecstatic lovers like Ḥusayn and Maṣṣūr in the place of gallows and rope, and cast the fighters for the faith, like Ḥusayn and 'Alī, in the place of swords and spears: in being martyrs they find eternal life and happiness and become witnesses to God's mysterious power.

This tradition is particularly strong in the Turkish world, where the names of both Ḥusayns occur often in Sūfī songs.

Turkish tradition, especially in the later Bektashi order, is deeply

indebted to Shī'ī Islam; but it seems that already in some of the earliest popular Sūfī songs in Turkey, those composed by Yunus Emre in the late 13th or early 14th century, the Prophet's grandsons played a special rôle. They are described, in a lovely song by Yunus, as the 'fountain head of the martyrs', the 'tears of the saints', and the 'lambs of mother Fātima'. Both of them, as the 'kings of the eight paradises', are seen as the helpers who stand at Kawthār and distribute water to the thirsting people—a beautiful inversion of Husayn suffering in the waterless desert of Karbalā'. (*Yunus Emre Divanı*, p. 569.)

The well known legend according to which the Prophet saw Gabriel bring a red and a green garment for his two grandsons, and was informed that these garments pointed to their future deaths through the sword and poison respectively, is mentioned in early Turkish songs, as it also forms a central piece of the popular Sindhi *manāqibā* which are still sung in the Indus Valley. And similar in both traditions are the stories of how the boys climbed on their grandfather Prophet's back, and how he fondled them. Thus, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn appear, in early Turkish songs, in various, and generally well known images, but to emphasize their very special rôle, Yunus Emre calls them 'the two earrings of the divine Throne'. (*Divan*, p. 569)

The imagery becomes even more colourful in the following centuries when the Shī'ī character of the Bektashi order increased and made itself felt in ritual and poetical expression. Husayn b. 'Alī is 'the secret of God', the 'light of the eyes of Muṣṭafā' (thus Seher Abdal, 16th cent.), and his contemporary, Hayreti, calls him, in a beautiful *marthīya*, 'the sacrifice of the festival of the greater *jihād*'. Has not his neck, which the Prophet used to kiss, become the place where the dagger fell?

The inhabitants of heaven and earth shed black tears today,
And have become confused like your hair, O Ḥusayn.

Dawn sheds its blood out of sadness for Ḥusayn, and the red tulips wallow in blood and carry the brandmarks of his grief on their hearts. . . (*Ergun, Bektāşi şairleri*, p.95).

The Turkish tradition and that in the regional languages of the Indian subcontinent are very similar. Let us have a look at the

development of the *marthīya*, not in the major literary languages, but rather in the more remote parts of the subcontinent, for the development of the Urdu *marthīya* from its beginnings in the late 16th century to its culmination in the works of Sauda and particularly Anis and Dabir is well known. In the province of Sind, which had a considerable percentage of Shi'ī inhabitants, Persian *marthīyas* were composed, as far as we can see, from around 1700 onwards. A certain 'Allāma (1682–1782), and Muḥammad Mu'in T'haro are among the first *marthīya-gūs* mentioned by the historians, but it is particularly Muḥammad Muḥsin, who lived in the old, glorious capital of lower Sind, Thatta, with whose name the Persian *marthīya* in Sind is connected. During his short life (1709–1750), he composed a great number of *tarjī'band* and particularly *salām*, in which beautiful, strong imagery can be perceived:

The boat of Muṣṭafā's family has been drowned in blood;
 The black cloud of infidelity has waylaid the sun;
 The candle of the Prophet was extinguished by the breeze of the
 Kūfans.

But much more interesting than the Persian tradition is the development of the *marthīya* in Sindhi and Siraiki proper. As Christopher Shackle has devoted a long and very informative article on the Multani *marthīya*, I will speak here only on some aspects of the *marthīya* in Sindhi. As in many other fields of Sindhi poetry, Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf of Bhit (1689–1752) is the first to express ideas which were later taken up by other poets. He devoted *Sur Kēdārō* in his Hindi *Risālō* to the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet, and saw the event of Karbalā' as embedded in the whole mystical tradition of Islam. As is his custom, he begins in *media res*, bringing his listeners to the moment when no news was heard from the heroes:

The moon of Muḥarram was seen, anxiety about the princes
 occurred.

What has happened?

Muḥarram has come back, but the Imams have not come.
 O princes of Medina, may the Lord bring us together

He meditates about the reason for their silence and senses the tragedy:

The Mirs have gone out from Medina, they have not come
back.

But then he realizes that there is basically no reason for sadness or mourning, for:

The hardship of martyrdom, listen, is the day of joy.¹
Yazīd has not got an atom of this love.
Death is rain for the children of 'Alī.

For rain is seen by the Oriental poets in general, and by Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf in particular, as the sign of divine mercy, of *raḥmat*, and in a country that is so much dependant on rain, this imagery acquires its full meaning.

The hardship of martyrdom is all joyful rainy season.
Yazīd has not got the traces of this love.
The decision to be killed was with the Imams from the very
beginning.

This means that, already in pre-eternity, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn had decided to sacrifice their lives for their ideals: when answering the divine address *Am I not you Lord?* (7: 171), they answered 'Balā' (= Yes)', and took upon themselves all the affliction (*bala*) which was to come upon them. Their intention to become a model for those who gain eternal life by suffering and sacrifice was made, as Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf reminds his listeners, at the very day of the primordial covenant. Then, in the following chapter, our Sindhi poet goes into more concrete details.

The perfect ones, the lion-like sayyids, have come to Karbalā';
Having cut with Egyptian swords, they made heaps of carcasses;
Heroes became confused, seeing Mīr Ḥusayn's attack.

But he soon turns to the eternal meaning of this battle and continues in good Sūfī spirit:

The hardship of martyrdom is all coquetry (*nāz*).
The intoxicated understand the secret of the case of Karbalā'.

¹ *Shādī*, which may also be 'wedding', e.g., 'urs.

In having his beloved suffer, the divine Beloved seems to show his coquetry, trying and examining their faith and love, and thus even the most cruel manifestations of the battle in which the 'youthful heroes', as Shāh Laṭīf calls them, are enmeshed, are signs of divine love.

The earth trembles, shakes; the skies are in uproar;
This is not a war, this is the manifestation of Love.

The poet knows that affliction is a special gift for the friends of God—'Those who are afflicted most are the prophets, then the saints, then the others in degrees'—and so he continues:

The Friend kills the darlings, the lovers are slain,
For the elect friends He prepares difficulties.
God, the Eternal, without need—what He wants, He does.

Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf devotes two chapters to the actual battle, and to Ḥurr's joining the fighters 'like a moth joins the candle', e.g., ready to imolate himself in the battle. But towards the end of the poem, the mystical aspect becomes once more prominent; those who 'fight in the way of God' reach Paradise, and the houris bind rose chains for them, as befits true bridegrooms. But even more:

Paradise is their place, overpowering they have gone to
Paradise,
They have become annihilated in God, with Him they have
become He. . . .

The heroes, who have never thought of themselves, but only of love of God which makes them face all difficulties, have finally reached the goal: the *fanā ft Allāh*, annihilation in God and remaining in Him. Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf has transformed the life of the Imams, and of the Imam Ḥusayn in particular, into a model for all those Sūfīs who strive, either in the *jihād-i aṣghar* or in the *jihād-i akbar*, to reach the final annihilation in God, the union which the Sūfīs so often express in the imagery of love and loving union. And it is certainly no accident that our Sindhi poet has applied the tune *Ḥusaynī*, which was originally meant for the dirges for Ḥusayn, to the story of his favourite heroine, Sassui, who annihilated herself in her constant, brave search for her beloved, and is finally transformed into him.

Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Laṭīf's interpretation of the fate of the Imam Ḥusayn as a model of suffering love, and thus as a model of the mystical path, is a deeply impressive piece of literature. It was never surpassed, although in his succession a number of poets among the Shī'a of Sindh composed elegies on Karbalā'. The most famous of them is Thābit 'Alī Shāh (1740–1810), whose speciality was the genre of *suwārī*, the poem addressed to the rider Ḥusayn, who once had ridden on the Prophet's back, and then was riding bravely into the battlefield. This genre, as well as the more common forms, persists in Sindhi throughout the whole of the 18th and 19th centuries, and even into our own times (Sachal Sarmast, Bedil Rohriwaro, Mir Hasan, Shah Naser, Mirza Baddhal Beg, Mirza Qalich Beg, to mention only a few, some of whom were Sunni Sūfīs). The *suwārī* theme was lovingly elaborated by Sangi, that is the Talpur prince 'Abdu 'l-Ḥusayn, to whom Sindhi owes some very fine and touching songs in honour of the prince of martyrs, and who strongly emphasizes the mystical aspects of the event of Karbalā': Ḥusayn is here put in relation with the Prophet.

The Prince has made his *mī'rāj* on the ground of Karbalā',
The Shah's horse has gained the rank of Burāq.

Death brings the Imam Ḥusayn, who was riding his Dhū 'l-janali, into the divine presence as much as the winged Burāq brought the Prophet into the immediate divine presence during his night journey and ascent into heaven.

Sangi knows also, as ever so many Shī'ī authors before him, that weeping for the sake of the Imam Ḥusayn will be recompensed by laughing in the next world, and that the true meditation of the secret of sacrifice in love can lead the seeker to the divine presence, where, finally, as he says

Duality becomes distant, and then one reaches unity.

The theme of Ḥusayn as the mystical model for all those who want to pursue the path of love looms large in the poetry of the Indus Valley and in the popular poetry of the Indian Muslims, whose thought was permeated by the teaching of the Sūfīs, and for whom, as for the Turkish Sūfīs and for 'Attār (and innumerable others), the suffering of the Imam Ḥusayn, and that of Ḥasan b.

Manṣūr, formed a paradigm of the mystic's life. But there was also another way to understand the rôle of Ḥusayn in the history of the Islamic people, and importantly, the way was shown by Muḥammad Iqbal, who was certainly a Sunni poet and philosopher. We mentioned at the beginning that it was he who saw the history of the Ka'ba defined by the two sacrifices—that of Ismail at the beginning, and that of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī in the end (*Bāl-i Jibrīl*, p. 92). But almost two decades before he wrote those lines, he had devoted a long chapter to Ḥusayn in his *Rumūz-i bēkhūdī* (p. 126ff). Here, Ḥusayn is praised—again in the mystical vocabulary—as the *imām* of the lovers, the son of the virgin, the cypress of freedom in the Prophet's garden. While his father, Hazrat 'Alī, was, in mystical interpretation, the *b* of the *bismi 'llāh*, the son became identified with the 'mighty slaughtering', a beautiful mixture of the mystical and Qur'ānic interpretations. But Iqbal, like his predecessors, would also allude to the fact that Ḥusayn, the prince of the best nation, used the back of the last prophet as his riding camel, and most beautiful is Iqbal's description of the jealous love that became honoured through his blood, which, through its imagery, again goes back to the account of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, who rubbed the bleeding stumps of his hands over his blackened face in order to remain *surkh rū*, red-faced and honoured, in spite of his suffering.

For Iqbal, the position of Ḥusayn in the Muslim community is as central as the position of the *sūrat al-ikhlās* in the Holy Book.

Then he turns to his favourite topic, the constant tension between the positive and negative forces, between the prophet and saint on the one hand, and the oppressor and unbeliever on the other. Ḥusayn and Yazīd stand in the same line as Moses and Pharaoh. Iqbal then goes on to show how the *khilāfat* was separated from the Qur'ānic injunctions and became a worldly kingdom with the appearance of the Umayyads, and it was here that Ḥusayn appeared like a raincloud—again the image of the blessing rain which always contrasts so impressively with the thirst and dryness of the actual scene of Karbalā'. It was Ḥusayn's blood that rained upon the desert of Karbalā' and left the red tulips there.

The connection between the tulips in their red garments and the

bloodstained garments of the martyrs has been a favourite image of Persian poetry since at least the 15th century, and when one thinks of the central place which the tulip occupies in Iqbal's thought and poetry as the flower of the manifestation of the divine fire, as the symbol of the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai, and as the flower that symbolizes the independent growth of man's *khūdī* (=self) under the most difficult circumstances, when one takes all these aspects of the tulip together, one understands why the poet has the Imam Ḥusayn 'plant tulips in the desert of Karbalā'. Perhaps the similarity of the sound of *lā ilāh* and *lāla* (=tulip), as well as the fact that *lāla* has the same numerical value as the word *Allāh*, e.g., 66, may have enhanced Iqbal's use of the image in connection with the Imam Ḥusayn, whose blood 'created the meadow', and who constructed a building of 'there is no deity but God.'

But whereas earlier mystical poets used to emphasize the person of Ḥusayn as model for the mytic who, through self-sacrifice, finally reaches union with God, Iqbal, understandably, stresses another point: 'To lift the sword is the work of those who fight for the glory of religion, and to preserve the God-given order.' 'Ḥusayn blood, as it were, wrote the commentary on these words, and thus awakened a sleeping nation.'

Again, the parallel with Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr is evident (at least with Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr in the way Iqbal interprets him: he too claims, in the *Falak-i mushtarī* in the *Jāvidnāma*, that he had come to bring resurrection to the spiritually dead, and had therefore to suffer). But when Ḥusayn b. 'Alī drew the sword—the sword of Allah—he shed the blood of those who are occupied with, and interested in, things other than God; graphically, the word *lā*, the beginning of the *shahāda*, resembles the form of a sword (preferably a two-edged sword, like Dhū 'l-fiqār), and this sword does away with everything that is an object of worship besides God. It is the prophetic 'No' to anything that might be seen beside the Lord. By using the sword of 'No', Ḥusayn, by his martyrdom, wrote the letters 'but God' (*illā Allāh*) in the desert, and thus wrote the title of the script by which the Muslims find salvation.

It is from Ḥusayn, says Iqbal, that we have learned the mysteries of the Qur'ān, and when the glory of Syria and Baghdad and the marvels of Granada may be forgotten, yet, the strings of the

instrument of the Muslims still resound with Ḥusayn's melody, and faith remains fresh thanks to his call to prayer.

Ḥusayn thus incorporates all the ideals which a true Muslim should possess, as Iqbal draws his picture: bravery and manliness, and, more than anything else, the dedication to the acknowledgement of God's absolute Unity; not in the sense of becoming united with Him in *fanā* as the Sūfī poets had sung, but, rather, as the herald who by his *shahāda*, by his martyrdom, is not only a *shahīd*, a martyr, but at the same time a witness, a *shāhid*, for the unity of God, and thus the model for all generations of Muslims.

It is true, as Iqbal states, that the strings of the Muslims' instruments still resound with his name, and we may close with the last verse of the chapter devoted to him in the *Rumūz-i bēkhūdī*:

O zephir, O messenger of those who are far away—
Bring our tears to his pure dust.



II

HISTORICAL AND DOCTRINAL PERSPECTIVES



THE IMAM ḤUSAYN: A STUDY IN THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

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THE history of man is a history of his liberation from both the internal and the external forces that tend to enslave him. This history is not a uniform process. There is no such thing as an uninterrupted progression towards more and more freedom from one century to another. As we look at history, we notice long periods of slavery and very brief periods of freedom. It all depends upon which criterion we have in view to regard one or another period of history as more or less free. For instance, our times are an expression of vast freedom from bondage to nature in terms of victory over physical distance and also with respect to the highly developed aids to our senses and calculative powers, but it is also a period of enslavement of man by structures and systems which are intricate, massive, and ever-growing in their grip over both the private and the collective life of man. Human history is thereby a vastly varying ratio of freedom and slavery. If man is free in one sphere, there is no certainty that he will be equally free in other spheres of life. The overall situation is of a two-fold imbalance: a social imbalance wherein only a few are free and the majority is not, and a spiritual imbalance wherein the majority is materially free but internally a slave to uncertainty and fear.

What is freedom? The straightforward procedure is to define freedom from a material point of view, and this is what concerns

the majority of the human race which is still, in spite of such a massive advancement of science and technology (we notice in the West), a victim of poverty, degradation, and exploitation. This immediately introduces the fact of regional imbalance which is a national and cultural expression of the social imbalance we have already mentioned. Both the facts, of imbalance in material freedom from poverty, and suffering due to starvation, and disease, and crude forms of exploitation (such as slavery, bonded labour, and low wages on a global scale), and also imbalance of material freedom within one society which is backward but tolerates extremes of wealth in the hands of the few, and stark poverty for the millions, are interlinked because they are the consequences of a system which exploits many for the benefit of the few. Why the few regard themselves as justified in exploiting the many is not a material factor but an ideological one which is a complex unity of certain forms of self-definitions in terms of race, class, and community. The straightforward procedure to define freedom from a material viewpoint is thus made difficult. The most concrete forms of the lack of freedom are functions of highly complex and unconcrete forms of a rationality which again is not a straight thought-process to gain more and more efficiency to control the majority for a particular set of tangible gains. This rationality is a response of the few who control and exploit to certain fears they possess deep within themselves. These fears are many, and vary in their intensity depending upon the cultural strength of the group in question. What interests us here is that all those who appear to be free in material terms are slaves to fears which they cannot handle on a materialistic plane. What is intriguing in this process is that one who deprives the other of his freedom should be a slave himself in a more tragic sense, namely, that *his material freedom is a veil over his real slavery*. We therefore correct the view we expressed at the outset regarding social and spiritual imbalance concerning the distribution of freedom both in the world as a whole and also within individual societies. In fact, there is no such thing as imbalance. The majority which lacks material freedom is interlocked with a minority which is outwardly materially free but inwardly as much and even more a slave to a vast body of fear and uncertainty. There is a symmetry between the outward lack of

freedom on the part of the many and the inward lack of freedom in the case of the few. Owing to this symmetry people suffer for very long periods in history without ever trying to alter their material and psychological conditions. Freedom is therefore freedom from both external want and internal fear.

There have been four modes, among others, of consciousness of freedom enveloping both the outward and the inward, and these modes are available to every human community in the form of different ideas and symbols. Let us examine them first in order to provide a broad-based introduction to the Islamic concept of freedom.

The first mode of consciousness of freedom enveloping both the outward and the inward was perceived in a state of mind which could be described as an elated or intoxicated sense of one's self experiencing freedom, courage, and total bliss. This state of mind was a passing flash or an artificially induced condition through one sort of drug or another. In its nature this mode comes close to certain levels of experience in non-theistic meditation and contemplation as well. The charm of this mode of freedom lies in the liberation of self from its social and economic identity and momentary victory over internal uncertainties and fears. After these states are gone the individual re-enters his society as a slave of his social and economic condition and without any basic alteration in the inner structure of his self. All societies possess this mode of consciousness of freedom without making it an integral part of their society or psychology. This mode is worth mentioning because it fulfills our criterion that freedom in the real sense should include both the external and the internal. But it is a deficient mode because it is first on the level of feeling which does not last long; secondly, it is at the mercy of external inducements, and above all, it lacks a world-view that involves freedom as a conscious value.

As soon as man became conscious and determined to enquire into the true nature of what was so intensely true in terms of a momentary glimpse of freedom through a sudden flash or artificially induced state of mind, he developed three other modes of reflection on freedom. They were: (a) agnostic, (b) monistic, and (c) theistic.

The agnostic mode of thought can be further differentiated into a

philosophical mode which is open to a monistic or theistic development and a psychological mode which is consciously atheistic. The former, namely, the philosophical, was what the Hellenistic school of thought came to be, and the principle which united the Platonic, Aristotlean, and Plotinian systems was that true freedom lay in man's liberation from his baser self and his ascent to a spiritual level. What distinguished man from animals was his reason, and what distinguished him as such was also the means of his salvation. Hence, purification and perfection of reason became the basic condition of human freedom. Only a philosopher, in the Platonic sense of the word, was a free man. Plato was perhaps the first person in history who knew that a free individual was possible only in a just society. Hence, he proposed his ideal republic which continued to inspire all those who, like Plato, dreamed of an ideal social condition to nurture freedom and justice.

The agnostic mode of reflection on freedom took on a psychological form in Buddhism which identified desire as the root of all suffering. Desire is a consequence of the attachment to things, and the basis of this desiring is located in a false self-consciousness that there is such a thing as a desiring soul (*atma*). The Buddhistic thought, particularly through its great exponent, Nagarjuna (2nd cent. AD), offers a totally new perspective to come out of the traditional dilemma of soul or no-soul, and suggested that there was only a dialectical basis for holding one view as against the other, whereas in a state of *nirvana* (which was true freedom) all discourse ceased, for discourse required the duality of subject and object, self and not-self; and when such a state was reached, one was free from all suffering. One ceases to be an actor and becomes a stage. The implications of the Buddhistic perspective for philosophy in general are yet not fully worked out, but within the context of the Upanishadic philosophy of self-knowledge the Buddhistic conception of freedom was a highly revolutionary idea and was recognized as such.

As we turn to the Upanishads, we are completely exposed to a thorough monism, the doctrine of the unity or oneness of being. All reality, both sensible and intelligible, is one. There is no such thing as one self confronting other selves and each confronting a not-self.

What is real is the Self, eternal, self-subsisting, partaking of all and yet independent of all. From the point of view of our concern with freedom, what interests us here is the way in which the Upanishads handle the problem of fear. Fear logically requires somebody or something other than one. We fear something which, we believe, exists independently and is external to us. When fear is located within ourselves, it is a case of a deep conflict and alienation. We are in such cases both ourselves and the other. The Upanishads resolve this problem by simply stating that there is no other: there is only one, singular existence; and when this is realized, all fear is abolished. Monism is the only basis for freedom from all bondage and suffering. The difference between the Upanishads and Buddhism seems to be this: that both reach a point of total convergence about abolishing all dualism, except that Nagarjuna would not speak of one reality as a necessary condition of *moksha* or *nirvana*. Let us immediately add that all this highly impressive speculation on self and not-self and on freedom and bliss was not mere fantasy in the minds of a few philosophers. Both the world-views, Vedic and Buddhist, influenced millions of people through centuries. The only objection which one may level against them is that they were indifferent to the structures of inequality and oppression in the social and economic order, thus entirely neglecting the material framework of freedom without which the spiritual quest is almost impossible for the majority of mankind. But this objection is equally applicable to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for they too, if not totally neglectful, were inconsistent in their concern for social and economic justice.

The fourth mode of consciousness of freedom enveloping both the external and the internal dimensions of man is the theistic, namely, that by consciously admitting and remembering that he is a slave to the God of the heavens and of the earth and all that is in all the visible and the invisible, intelligible and spiritual worlds, man is liberated from all bondage to men and things. History of human freedom now becomes a history of the prophetic breakthrough, how each prophetic moment was a moment of liberation from the false absolutes of race, nation, wealth, and power. Within this theistic liberation of mankind we notice four strands. (a) First is the process of becoming an individual: every prophet who was

eventually given a commission first became an individual with respect to his race and community and extricated himself either from a pagan or a self-righteous conduct of his family or clan. (b) Second was the lonely quest and withdrawal both in the outward and in the interior of his self which was at the same time a process of seeking community with the unseen and the spiritual. (c) Third was the unpremeditated and sudden experience of transcendence in the form of a voice or vision which overwhelms, transforms and informs the lonely seeker concerning a new dimension or knowledge and imparts to him his prophetic vocation. And (d) the fourth and final stage is of return to his people in order to call them to a new awareness and way of life which is like the first stage, namely, an individual versus his species, now, not withdrawing from them, but confronting them to awaken and warn them.

What distinguishes the theistic-prophetic mode of consciousness of freedom from the Vedic and Buddhistic modes is the concern of the former with four aspects of the question which are however deducible from the Vedic and Buddhistic formulations but are not so explicitly and intensely stressed as in the prophetic-theistic understanding. First is the birth of the individual who cuts himself off from his group, withdraws from it, and goes on his quest to relocate his individuality in a new world, both moral and spiritual. This is not the same thing as the Indian preoccupation with self. Here, the individual man is the central concern. Freedom at this stage implies the strength on the part of the individual to leave his society. Second is the mysterious and bewildering prospect of the lonely quest within which the individual seeks community with worlds, both invisible and unborn. He becomes the epitome of liberated humanity and of the human potential to be free. Such an individual was Abraham in whom all nations became free, for he was both a single individual and a plural humanity. Unlike the Vedic and Buddhistic modes of consciousness of freedom the theistic-prophetic mode is intensely occupied with the experience of transcendence, objectivity, and certitude, whose realization is not from 'within' but from 'outside', and this is vastly consequential for its conception of freedom. The experience of a transcendent and overwhelmingly powerful Reality brings to the individual a total sense of inadequacy, finitude and dependence. He loses his freedom

before the freedom of the Almighty God. This loss of freedom on the part of man, this entry into the servanthood of his total person before God, and this experience of being enveloped by a knowledge and might whose source and extent he can never fully know makes him an *'abd*. He becomes a free *bashar* as he cuts himself off from his community and goes on his quest. With the experience of a Reality that transcends him he turns from a *bashar* to an *'abd* of God. It is this *'abdiyya* as a source of both spiritual and historical freedom which is absent in the Indian philosophies of *nirvana*. Furthermore as a *free slave* (it is in this paradox that we discover the true significance of the theistic mode of consciousness of freedom) man enters his society to confront it, awaken it, and liberate it. Whoever hears his call and follows him goes through the same double transformation—becoming free vis-à-vis his former world and becoming a slave vis-à-vis the newly discovered and fully realized awareness of a transcendent God.

The Islamic conception of freedom is an example of the theistic mode of consciousness. To discuss some of its basic features, we should now turn to the Qur'ān which is a revelation of both *insāniyya* and *'abdiyyā* (the true humanity and the true servanthood of man). Unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān is both consistent and explicit on the question of both spiritual and historical freedom. The Qur'ān deals with freedom on theological, mystical and social levels. All these

levels are inter-connected for they were all one in the person of the Prophet whose ministry involved both the religious and the social transformation of man.

With respect to the Qur'ān, let us in the first place refer to a very significant passage in the sura of Joseph: *O my fellow prisoners! are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Almighty?* (12: 39)

It is one of those verses in the Qur'ān which contain a world of meaning, though the words employed to convey it are few and simple. Consider the phrase 'fellow prisoners'. Joseph is in prison along with two other prisoners. They constitute a company which is representative of the world as a whole. Apparently, they are all prisoners deprived of their freedom in its outward and social sense. But is Joseph a prisoner in reality? With the awareness of the faith he has in one Almighty Lord he is inwardly free though a companion in prison with other prisoners. Is this not the case with

all men and women of God who outwardly share the tyranny of the social conditions they share with their fellow men but are inwardly free, for their hearts are with God? Joseph turns the prison into a school: are diverse lords better, or one, singular, All-powerful Lord? He transforms the meaning of the word 'prisoners'; it is not the material condition which imprisons man but his inner condition, his mental slavery to diverse lords which master him through a variety of false hopes and fears that makes even an outwardly open space into a dark and compressed dungeon. Joseph, being already a free man due to his inner consciousness, makes his fellow prisoner taste what real freedom is. The truth of the matter is that inner freedom precedes and survives outer freedom. One does not increase one's inner freedom by getting out of a physical prison, nor decreases it by entering into it. Joseph was a son of Jacob before and after entering the prison! His lineage was a lineage of freedom.

The first principle of the Islamic conception of freedom is therefore based on the internal awareness that there is only one Lordship, namely, of God; and it is this awareness which makes a slave a free man, and without it a free man is a slave. With this awareness a prisoner is free in spite of being locked up inside a dark cell, and without it, the one who imprisons him is the real prisoner.

The second principle is related to the dynamics of social transformation, namely, *jihād*, a principle that requires the believers to fight in the way of God and in the way of freedom: *How should you not fight for the cause of God and of the oppressed among men and of the women and children who are crying: 'Our Lord! Bring us forth from out of this township of which the people are oppressors! O, give us from Thy Presence some protecting friend! O, give us from Thy Presence some defender!'* (4: 75) Nowhere is the cause of God so closely linked with the cause of the oppressed as in the Qur'ānic call. It is this dimension of a complete linkage between the spiritual and social meanings of freedom that the Qur'ān upholds throughout its discourse that makes it a unique text both for contemplation and social action. It is in this framework that one can appreciate how both the Meccan and the Medinan ministries of the Prophet are a part of a larger totality, that *tawhīd* is also *hurriyya* (freedom). Watch the close connection between fighting in the cause of God

and fighting in the cause of the oppressed, and also notice the list of the oppressed—men, women and children who cry to their Lord for protection and help. The prayer is answered through the decision on the part of the believers to fight for their liberation. The basis for *jihād* is both a divine sanction and also a response to the cries of the oppressed to go to their assistance. The action that flows from *tawhīd* is now a part of a vast historical process. The Qur'ān makes the matter very clear by distinguishing between two types of believers—one group which is satisfied with what they believe and remain in their homes, and the other group which believes and goes out to fight in the way of God, risking their lives and giving up their comforts: *Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a disability, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of God with their wealth and lives.* (4: 95)

Īmān (=faith) is inextricably joined with *jihād*, and it is the latter which makes Islam a historical force and its conception of freedom socially and politically relevant.

The third principle of the Islamic conception of freedom is based on its view on *al-ākhir* (eschatology/life hereafter). The secret of what we have said earlier, that with awareness of the Lordship of one Almighty Lord a slave becomes a free man and without this awareness a free man is in reality a slave, can now be unveiled: what strengthens a man of God to go through the externally produced conditions of oppression and hardship without suffering from any agitation at the inward level of his mind and heart is his knowledge of his true origin and destiny: *We are of God, and unto Him we are returning.* (2: 156)

We can say now that this sense of origin and destiny is the cornerstone of the Islamic view of freedom. Man becomes free and remains free as he constantly remembers both the words and the meanings of this remarkably simple and profound verse in the Qur'ān, for therein both anthropology, which is spiritual, and eschatology, which is historical, are conjoined. Let us recall a crucial moment of prophetic history which is common to both the Bible and Qur'ān. The occasion is when Moses is confronting the Pharaoh who decides to confront Moses through his magicians: *And when the magicians came they said unto Pharaoh: 'Will there surely be a reward for us if we are victorious?' He said: 'Yes, and you*

will then surely be of those brought near.' Moses said unto them: 'Throw what you are going to throw.' They they threw down their cards and staffs and said: By Pharaoh's might we verily are victorious. Then Moses threw his staff and it swallowed that which they did falsely display. And the magicians were flung prostrate, crying: 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds. The Lord of Moses and Aaron.' Pharaoh said: 'You put your faith in him before I give you leave? Lo! He doubtless is your chief who taught you magic! But verily you shall come to know. Verily I will cut off your hands and feet alternately, and verily I will crucify you every one.' They said: 'It is no harm, for unto our Lord we shall return.' (26: 41-50)

This straightforward narrative sums up all that is central not only to the question under discussion but also to the victory of the prophetic revelation over a world deeply immersed in the occult and the magical. But let us concentrate upon the narrative to bring out its significance for the Islamic concept of freedom. Threatened with certain death, the magicians said with a surprising degree of calm: 'It is no harm whether you crucify us and cut off our hands and feet, for we shall return to our Lord.' What was it that shall return to God, while their bodies lay on the ground dead and cut into pieces? What faith was it that made them so fearless about death? We cannot go into the depth of these questions within the limited scope of this paper. For our purposes it is sufficient to point out that true freedom, as the story of the conversion of the magicians brings out so forcefully, lies in victory over fear of death. This certainty that there is life after death and there is a sure returning to God was also at the heart of the social struggle of Islam. It inspired the Muslims to fight in the way of God, to kill and get killed, to leave their homes and families, to suffer hardship and misery, to have the courage which drew its strength from their faith in an invisible but more real world, and to confront the might and power of the world. Islam entered history not only with a clear *tawhīd* but also with a complete confidence in the *ākhirā*.

When the Prophet stood up to deliver his farewell sermon at the close of his mission, he faced a crowd which consisted of two kinds of people—those who had followed him from the very beginning of the movement, and had suffered persecution, and those who had joined the fold of Islam after the Prophet had victoriously entered

Mecca and who had seen the usefulness of embracing an ascendent religion which could bring them both economic and political gains. The history of Islam now enters a very crucial phase. Similarly, the Islamic conception of freedom will be tried now under a new threat of the opportunist group ultimately taking command. It is in this very problematic phase of Islamic history that the role of the People of the House of the Prophet obtains a profound and lasting significance.

First and foremost is the *ḥuzn* (sorrow) of Fāṭima which is representative of the alienation of a Muslim in a Muslim society. What went wrong that the very daughter of the Prophet should impose upon herself a total withdrawal from the community which her father had founded? This question is not raised here in a polemical manner. This is not the issue here. The reasons for the alienation of Fāṭima with the post-prophetic developments are associated with a process, and unless we know it in its true nature and significance we will not be able to appreciate and value the martyrdom of Ḥusayn.

Whatever we say now should be very carefully and patiently studied. There is sufficient room here to become excited on sectarian levels and lose sight of the basic challenges that confront the student of the first century of Islam. Let us simply state that the institution we know as the Caliphate, however necessary, involved political power. Again, however, we go on repeating that the religious and the political constitute a unity in Islam and therefore one cannot say that the Caliphate involved just political power; we should remember that a Caliph, though a *khalifa* of the Messenger and then a *khalifa* of the previous Caliph, was primarily an *amīr* of the believers. It was this *amāra* which became the source of all later problems. The traditional distinction between the Rightly Guided Caliphate and the Caliphate of Damascus and Baghdad rested on the evaluation that the *amāra* of the first four Caliphs was in the service of Islam, whereas the *amāra* of the later Caliphs was more in their self-interest. The very fact that the title, *amīr*, got associated with Mu'āwiya in its exclusively political connotation should demonstrate the validity of the analysis that is being made here that it was in the very nature of *amāra* to assert itself as an autonomous power which could exploit every economic, social and religious

value for its legitimization. The *huzn* of Fāṭima at the very inception of the Caliphate can now be understood as her profound scepticism about the institution which, for a time, will be close to the *sunna* of the Prophet, but which, owing to the very nature of the *amāra* on which it rests, will assert itself as the gravest threat to the *hurriyya* of Islam. In modern terms, we can say that state as an all-embracing institution tends to become a source of alienation. In Islamic terms, state is a lordship of man over man; and it is in this sense that it may become a god by itself, and, as it puts on the garb of indispensability and desirability, its true nature of being a false divinity is not easily discernable. It is for this reason that I regard 'Islamic state' as a contradiction in terms—how could these two terms be used together, one which regards God as the only Lord, and another which competes with God for total loyalty and surrender? I would prefer the term 'republic' to 'state', for the reason that the former does not possess the absolutist perspective of the idea of state. One should always remember that 'state' is neither good nor bad (for these judgements are applicable to governments), and in this sense 'state' becomes a transcendental concept with its own mystique and ritual. Islam of the Qur'ān has nothing to do with this transcendence of the secular. The Islam of the People of the House of the Prophet is a constant *jihād* against this false god which took possession of Islamic history since its very beginning, particularly with the Caliphates of Damascus and Baghdad.

It is part and parcel of the Shī'ī conception of history that, whenever *amāra*, which is the basic constituent of *khilāfa*, becomes an exclusively political institution, and 'state' demands such loyalty and surrender from Muslims as is due only to God, a man or a part will rise to protest against it, whereas in the traditional Sunnī conception there has always been doubt regarding protest against the established Caliphate, and this is very obvious in the term *fitna*, which is indiscriminately used for every protest against the state. But from a Shī'ī point of view, it is not only to establish *shar'ā* but also to preserve *tawhīd* that clear protest should be launched. Hence the Shī'ī theory of protest is not only of moral but also of theological significance.

The post-prophetic developments involved a three-fold process: a non-prophetic central authority, division among Muslims as to the

criteria, nature, and role of this authority, and territorial expansion. The last-mentioned brought into Islam such power and wealth as was possessed by earlier empires. Outwardly there was expansion and inwardly there was deep conflict of interest and ambition. The tragic events during the Caliphate of 'Uthmān demonstrated how basic was the rift between those who wielded power and those who felt alienated from it. The Caliphate of 'Alī brought the conflict into the open. The Battle of Jamal was the saddest of all conflicts because the parties on both sides were led by Muslims who were among the first of the converts to Islam. The Battle of Siffin and its inconclusive end was a further clarification of the rift between those who upheld the Islamic ideals and those who were dedicated to personal gain and ambition. All this happened within twenty-eight years of the Prophet's death. The ideal unity of the religious and the political had soon become more of a political system which controlled and exploited the religious. The withdrawal of the Imam Hasan from politics could be understood as a profoundly insightful decision because by withdrawing the Imam upheld the autonomy and superiority of the religious that a time would come that from a household that had then withdrawn into seclusion a clear and unmistakable protest would arise to confront the political and unmask its true nature and intention. Thus, the withdrawal of the Imam Hasan was a preparation for the purity and authenticity of the protest of Husayn.

The *amāra* which was at the basis of the Caliphate became clearly visible when Mu'āwiya nominated his son as his successor, as the *amīr* of the faithful. The post-prophetic development had now reached a climax. Husayn was the last surviving member of the divinely approved group of the *mubāhila*, and on him now rested the overall responsibility to confront the established system. Husayn laid down all the rules of *jihād*, now right within the body politic of Islam. The rules were both general and specific: the general rules remained the same as they were for any *jihād* as laid down by the Qur'ān and *sunna*, but the specific rules pertained to the model which Husayn himself represented. We are concerned here more with the latter.

As Husayn left Medina, he pointed to the first principle of the archetypal *jihād* in the way of freedom, namely, the principle of

ghurba. The *mujāhid* now is not only a *muhājir* but also a *gharīb*. By avoiding the *hajj*, he safeguarded the *ḥurma* of the Ka'ba, another principle for the *mujāhidīn* within the body politic of Islam that their action should not violate the sanctity of the Ka'ba or for that reason of any mosque or shrine. By telling his companions on the night of 'Āshūrā that they were free to leave him, he made plain another principle that each one of them should personally and freely arrive at the choice to lay down his life for the cause for which Husayn had left Medina. This personal choice was like the first decision of accepting Islam and giving the testimony that Muḥammad was the Apostle of God. To follow Husayn was not like one of the obligatory acts with the Muslim requirements. To follow Husayn was now to accept Islām again as individuals, as free men. In a strange and symbolic sense, Husayn made his companions feel free to take a very serious decision, for now to remain with him, to re-enter Islām in this sense, was to suffer and die the following day. There was no promise of any territorial or economic benefit, just the promise of life hereafter and the pleasure of God and of His Messenger. Never was the decision to accept Islam so close to faith in *ākhirā*. Husayn made Karbalā' a symbol of perfect unity of *tawḥīd* and *al-ākhirā*, and a unity like this can be expressed only through martyrdom. Only by suffering a tragic end did Husayn become an immortal symbol of protest against, and rejection of, the false god of *amāra* and 'state'. As such, the tragic end became a mirror for an inner and more lasting victory.

The *ḥurriyya* which Husayn symbolized was both linked with its general meaning in the Islamic perspective on *'abdiyya* as the basis of freedom from all forms of slavery, and also distinct from it in its emphasis on how this *ḥurriyya* could be asserted and preserved within the historical framework of the Islamic body politic. Muslim society, like any other society, is likely to become, under the weight of the structures it creates to institutionalize and legitimize power, a dangerously enslaving system. Only a consciousness like that of Husayn could preserve a Muslim mind from being exploited by the institutional and structural despotism which could be made sacred in the guise of a self-righteous 'orthodoxy'. Hence the Islamic conception of freedom as it emerges out of the life and martyrdom of Husayn rests on the following principles. (i) *Jihād* is not only

striving in the Way of God but also in the way of the oppressed. (ii) A Muslim is one who, while affirming that there is only One Real God, is on the alert throughout his historical journey, and should identify both empirically and conceptually the false gods of every epoch, and they could be concealed behind an apparently sanctioned symbol or virtue, namely order and solidarity, or could be transparent in terms of the self-glorification of race, language, nation, or ideology. (iii) The greatest threat to Islam lies from within the body politic of Islam itself wherein structures and systems could very subtly replace God and instil in the minds of Muslims the fear of the finite in place of the fear of the Infinite. And (iv) The philosophy of revolution that follows this view of freedom in Islam involves (a) a critical consciousness of structures and systems, (b) a radical view of history as a process of liberation from, or enslavement by, the false absolutes, (c) a reconstruction of social order after the norms of quest and humility in the Way of God, and (d) a working together with the rest of mankind in the common task of creating such conditions in the world as ensure freedom, justice, and peace.

We are now at the threshold of a new era. Everywhere there is a rediscovery of the spiritual resources for both individual and collective transformation. From Iran to Latin America, though in different forms and modes, there is a vast effort to liberate man from both the internal and external forces of oppression. Each community of man has its own heritage, for God has not left any community without a guide. Our heritage is Husayn, and for us his name represents the whole realm of *hurriyya*. May God help us in remembering him when he stood alone in Karbalā', for it is in his loneliness that we come to realise what it really means to say: *lā ilāha* (there is no god) *illā 'llāh* (but God).

THE EXCELLENCES OF THE IMĀM ḤUSAYN IN SUNNĪ ḤADĪTH TRADITION

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HUMAN history may be seen as a record of the eternal struggle between right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil, and righteousness and wickedness. This struggle was decreed by God when Adam, an earthly creature, was sent to earth to engage in this eternal battle. It is through this struggle that human beings can earn their eternal bliss in the Gardens of Paradise, or their eternal punishment in the Fire. In the history of nations this struggle often attains universal significance as that moment of the struggle can speak to all subsequent times and situations. Thus the Qur'ān urges us over and over again to ponder the end of those who were before us, and how God dealt with them. In every case, moreover, a prophet or messenger of God was rejected by his people and killed or driven out. In this sense, therefore, the struggle is in the end between God and humankind, between truth and falsehood, and between right guidance and manifest error.

Nowhere is this struggle placed in sharper relief than in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the lives of the people of his House. The life and witness of the Imam Ḥusayn in particular, has acquired special significance in Muslim piety. This is because he has provided a model for all martyrs in the way of God, for all time.

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the universal significance of the Imam in Muslim tradition. It is important to

observe that all the traditions cited in this essay are found in both Shī'ī and Sunni *hadīth* literature. But while in the Sunni community such traditions remain purely pietistic, Shī'ī tradition has made them the basis of a complex theological system.

However, to appreciate the place of Husayn, 'the prince of martyrs', in Muslim history, a word must be said about the place of the Prophet's family (the *ahl al-bayt*) in Muslim piety. At the same time the people of the House of the Prophet Muḥammad are not unique in the prophetic history of human societies. A word is, therefore, necessary concerning the families of other prophets, if we are to appreciate fully the devotion which Muslims throughout their long history have accorded the people of the House of Muḥammad, the seal of the prophets.

Prophetic history begins, according to the Qur'ān, with Adam, called *ṣafwat Allāh* (the elect of God). He was followed by Noah, the first of the prophets of power or resolve (*ulū al-'azm*). Noah was sent as a messenger by God to his people who rebelled against God's message, and were thus destroyed by the flood. Then came Abraham, the father of prophets. With his son Ishmael he built the Ka'ba, the first house for the worship of God.¹ Ishmael was also a prophet, and the ancestor of the prophets Shu'ayb, Ṣāliḥ, Hūd, and finally Muḥammad, the last messenger of God to humankind.

Isaac, Abraham's second son, was also a prophet and the father of prophets. Among his descendants were the family of 'Imrān, the father of Moses, and Jesus, as well as other earlier prophets who were sent by God to the Children of Israel. The Qur'ān declares that *God has elected Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrān*. It further states that they were *a single progeny, one from the other*.² All the prophets and their families are therefore of one physical and spiritual lineage. They and their households are the elect of God, purified and honoured over the rest of humankind.

The people of the House of the Prophet Muḥammad were likewise chosen by God and purified from all evil and sin. The Muslim community did not, however, infer the status of the family of Muḥammad from that of earlier prophets and their families.

¹ See 2: 127, 3: 96.

² See 3: 33.

Rather they too were chosen by God and purified from all evil and sin. Yet because Muḥammad was the last prophet sent to guide humanity to God and the good, his descendants could not assume his prophetic role. Their mission was to be the Imams, or guides, of the Muslim community. Their task is to safeguard the message vouchsafed to Muḥammad by God for humankind. Like many prophets, the Imams had to endure rejection by their people and much suffering at their hands; martyrdom in the cause of God was often their lot. Yet the greater the suffering, the greater is the reward and honour which God promises His prophets, friends (*awliyā'*), and righteous servants. Thus the Prophet was asked: 'Who among men are those afflicted with the greatest calamity?' He replied

The prophets, then the pious, everyone according to the degree of his piety. A man is afflicted according to his faith (*dīn*); if his faith is durable, his affliction is accordingly increased, and if his faith is weak, his affliction is made lighter. Afflictions continue to oppress the worshipful servant until they leave him walking on the face of the earth without any sin cleaving to him.³

EXCELLENCES OF THE AHL AL-BAYT

In both Sunni and Shī'ī Muslim tradition, one important event symbolizes the status of the *ahl al-bayt* and the human as well as spiritual dimensions of their relation to the Prophet. This is the tradition or episode of *al-kisā'* (the mantle, or cloak) which the Prophet spread over himself and Fāṭima his daughter, 'Alī, and their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. This tradition has come down to us in a number of versions, each stressing one or another aspect of the excellences of the family of the Prophet and his love for them. Aḥmad b. Hanbal relates on the authority of Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, that he said to Fāṭima one day

'Bring me your husband and two sons.' When they had all come together he spread over them a mantle, and laying his hand over them, he said: 'O God, these are the people of the House of Muḥammad! Let therefore your prayers and blessings descend upon Muḥammad and the people of the

³ *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, quoted in M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978), p. 25, and see also pp. 25-6.

House of Muḥammad; for you are worthy of all praise and glory.' Umm Salama continued: 'I then lifted the mantle to enter in with them, but he pulled it away from my hand saying, "You too shall come to a good end".'⁴

The point which this version of the *kisā'* tradition emphasizes is that the *ahl al-bayt* are only the five: Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn. Umm Salama, one of the most highly venerated on the Prophet's wives, was denied this special status. We shall have more to say about this point, as it is emphasized in almost every version of this tradition.

In another highly interesting version of the *kisā'* tradition, related on the authority of 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far b. Abī Tālib, we read:

As the Apostle of God saw mercy descending, he demanded: 'Call them for me, call them for me!' Ṣafīyya asked: 'Who should we call, O Messenger of God?' He answered: 'Call the people of my household: 'Aḥ, Fāṭima, Hasan, and Husayn.' When they were brought, he spread a mantle over them; then lifting his hands to heaven said: 'O God, these are the people of my House; bless, O God, Muḥammad and the people of the House of Muḥammad!' God then sent down the verse: *Surely God wishes to remove all abomination from you, O People of the House, and purify you with a thorough purification.*⁵

This version of the tradition provides the meaning of the *kisā'* and the basis of its significance. The mantle is a symbol of divine mercy and blessing covering the Prophet and his holy family. It is, moreover, a source or haven of consolation and serenity in the face of the great sufferings and martyrdom which the Prophet's family had to endure after him. In this infinite source of divine mercy, the pious also share in times of sufferings and afflictions. The *kisā'* finally sets apart the 'holy five' from the rest of the faithful, and distinguishes them from the rest of the Prophet's family.

The event of the *kisā'* provides the occasion for the revelation of the verse of purification just cited. Before the sectarian conflicts which split the Muslim community set in, classical tradition was almost unanimous in interpreting this verse as referring to the

⁴ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Muṣnad* (Cairo, 1313), IV, 323.

⁵ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nīsābūrī, *Mustadrak al-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Haydarabad [Deccan], 1324), III, 147. See also 33: 33.

Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima al-Zahrā' (the Radiant), her husband and cousin, 'Alī, and their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.⁶

In still another version of the *kisā'* tradition, the continuity of the Prophet's family with those of earlier prophets is clearly indicated. Wāthila b. l-Asqa', on whose authority this tradition in most of its variants is related, reports the following prayer uttered by the Prophet:

O God, as you have bestowed your blessings, mercy, forgiveness, and pleasure upon Abraham and the family of Abraham, so they ['Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn] are of me and I am of them! Bestow, therefore, your blessings, mercy, forgiveness and pleasure upon me and them.⁷

This prayer echoes a prayer which Muslims repeat daily:

O God, bless Muḥammad and the people of the House of Muḥammad, as you have blessed Abraham and the people of the House of Abraham among all beings.

The House of Muḥammad is, therefore, for all Muslims, 'the household of prophethood and the frequenting place of angels'. The famous Qur'ān commentator al-Suyūṭī quotes a tradition attributed to Umm Salāma in interpretation of the verse of purification:

This verse was sent down in my house There were in the house then, seven: Gabriel and Michael, and 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and I stood at the door of the house. I asked: 'O Messenger of God, am I not of the People of the House?' He said: 'You shall indeed come to a good end! You are, however, one of the wives of the Prophet.'⁸

The close friendship between the Prophet and the holy family, a relationship which went far beyond the bond of blood relation, may be seen in the incident of the *mubāhala*, or prayer ordeal, with which the Prophet challenged the Christians of Najrān.⁹ In the *mubāhala* verse of the Qur'ān, God orders the Prophet and his

⁶ See, for example, the commentary on this verse in al-Zamakhshārī and al-Ṭabarī.

⁷ 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Muttaqī b. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl* (Haydarabad [Deccan], 1312), p. 217.

⁸ See the commentary on 33: 33 in al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

⁹ See 3: 61. See also Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* (Cairo, 1920), II, 300, and Ibn Ḥanbal, I, 185.

opponents to 'Call together our sons and your sons, our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves.' In the view of most Qur'ān commentators and traditionists, the Prophet's sons are Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, 'his women' refers to Fāṭima, and 'his self' refers, apart from himself, to 'Alī. When the people of Najrān saw them, they recognized their high status with God, and with great trepidation they declined the *mubāhala* and opted instead for peace.

Tradition asserts that the Prophet sensed the hostility which his community was to show to the People of his House after him. He is said to have often declared, 'I am at war against him who fights against you, and will show peace toward him who shows peace to you.' This invective is strongly put in a tradition related on the authority of Abū Bakr, the Prophet's famous Companion and the first caliph. He said:

I saw the Messenger of God pitch a tent in which he placed 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. He then declared: 'O Muslims, I am at war against anyone who wars against the people of this tent, and am at peace with those who show peace toward them. I am a friend to those who befriend them. He who shows love toward them shall be one of a happy ancestry and good birth. Nor would anyone hate them except that he be of miserable ancestry and evil birth.'¹⁰

Love for the Prophet's family is enjoined by God in the Qur'ān, where He says: *Say, 'I ask no other reward of you save love of my next of kin'* (42: 23). Qur'ān commentators have generally agreed that 'the next of kin' here intended are the *ahl al-bayt*.¹¹

The People of the House of the Prophet Muḥammad have been for the pious an example of generosity, steadfastness in the face of hardship, and a source of solace in time of trials and afflictions. After days of fasting and prayers for the health of the two sick children Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the family fed the few morsels of dry bread and dates for which 'Alī had laboured so hard to the needy. On the first evening, we are told, a beggar came. On the second, it was an orphan, and on the third, a captive. To each in turn, they gave the loaf of barley bread and few dates which Fāṭima had

¹⁰ Abū Ja'far Aḥmad 'al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Riyāḍ al-nādira* (Cairo, n.d.), II, 199. For other versions of this tradition, see Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Fayrūzābādī, *Faḍā'il al-khamsa fi ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta* (Najaf, 1384), p. 252.

¹¹ See the commentaries on this verse in al-Zamakhshārī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Ṣuyūfī.

prepared for the family to break their fast. Thus God sent down the verse: *They give food to eat, even though they cherish it, to the needy, the orphan and the captive.*¹² Yet, in the end, God sent down a celestial table to feed His friends.

Early tradition shows a tension in the relationship of the Prophet to the community and in the relationship of the latter to the holy family. Much of the literature reflecting this tension was most likely the product of a later age, but projected back to the time of the Prophet and his Companions. Here love for the Prophet's family is not simply recommended as a pious act, but is presented as a challenge, and in a harsh reproaching tone. Furthermore, it is on this love to the *ahl al-bayt* that rewards and punishments on the Last Day are predicated.¹³ Thus we are told that the Prophet said:

He who desires the pleasure to live my life, die my death and dwell in a garden of Eden which my Lord has planted, let him be a friend to 'Alī after me. Let him also be a friend to his friends. Let him finally be guided by the Imams after me, for they are my progeny. They were created of my clay, and have been vouchsafed knowledge and understanding. Woe to those of my community who deny their superiority, and those who violate the demands of kindness to my next of kin. May God not grant them my intercession.¹⁴

In another tradition, the Prophet promises his intercession to those who honour his descendants, provide them with whatever needs they may have, and those who love them with their heart and profess this love with their tongues.¹⁵

It has already been stressed that the *ahl al-bayt* share with the prophets of old and their descendants a high status and divine favour, but not the office of prophethood. They share, moreover, with the Prophet Muḥammad the prerogative of intercession. This is expressed in hagiographical language, a language common to both Sunni and Shī'ī tradition. One such common example may suffice to demonstrate the devotion in the piety of both traditions to the Prophet and the people of his household.

¹² 76: 8.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of this tradition, see M. Ayoub, pp. 43–5.

¹⁴ Abū Nu'aym, Ahmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Isbahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā'* (Cairo, 1351), I, 86.

¹⁵ Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, VIII, 151, and IV, 217. See also Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Hajar al-Haytamī al-Asqalānī, *Al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqa* (Cairo, 1312), p. 150.

The Qur'ān tells us that Adam received certain words of God which earned him God's forgiveness and mercy: *Adam received words from his Lord, and He turned towards him; for He is relenting, compassionate* (2: 37). Suyūṭī reports that Ibn 'Abbās, the famous traditionist and authority on the Qur'ān, asked the Prophet about the words which Adam received. The Prophet answered: 'He prayed saying, "O God, for the sake of Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, do turn toward me", and He turned toward him.'¹⁶ In another highly dramatic version of this tradition, Adam is taught the words as the only means by which God would accept his repentance and forgive him. 'Alī, we are told, enquired of the Prophet concerning the verse under discussion. The Prophet told him that when Adam and his wife were expelled from Paradise, Adam wept bitterly over his sin for a hundred years. Finally, Gabriel came to him and spoke thus on God's behalf:

O Adam, did I not create you with my own hand? Did I not breathe into you of my spirit? Did I not command my angels to bow down before you? Did I not provide you with Eve my servant? 'Yes', Adam answered. Gabriel asked: 'What then is the cause of this weeping?' Adam replied, 'Why should I not weep when I have been expelled from the proximity of the All-Merciful?' The angel then said: 'You must pray fervently with these words, and God will accept your repentance and forgive your sin. Say: "O God, I beseech you for the sake of Muḥammad and the people of the household of Muḥammad; nor is there any god but you. I have done evil, and have wronged my soul. Turn towards me, for you are relenting, compassionate."¹⁷

ḤASAN AND ḤUSAYN

Islamic tradition has preserved numerous anecdotes depicting the tender care and love which the Prophet showed Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. They were both born in Medina, and thus knew the Prophet only as children. It is therefore with the intimacy and love of a grandfather that the early life of the two Imams is coloured. Once more, these family anecdotes also reflect clearly the theological and political tension within the community, a tension which largely centered around Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. One such anecdote is the following.

¹⁶ See the commentary on 2: 37 in al-Suyūṭī.

¹⁷ Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, I, 234.

One day, we are told, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were lost, and their mother Fāṭima came to the Prophet greatly alarmed. The angel Gabriel, however, came down and told the Prophet that the two youths were asleep in an animal fold some distance away. God, the angel reassured the anxious family, had charged an angel to keep watch over them. The Prophet went to the spot and found the angel had spread his two wings: one under them and the other over them as cover. The Prophet stooped over the two children and began to kiss them until they awoke. He then carried them on his shoulders back to the city. A large crowd of Muslims followed the Prophet and his two grandsons to the mosque. The Prophet then addressed the assembled people and said: 'O Muslims, shall I inform you of those who have the best grandfather and grandmother of humankind?' 'Yes, O Apostle of God', they all replied. 'They are Ḥasan and Ḥusayn', he said. 'Their grandfather is the Apostle of God, the seal of the Messengers, and their grandmother is Khadīja, daughter of Khuwaylid, mistress of the women of Paradise.' The Prophet then declared Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to have the best maternal uncle and aunt: Ja'far and Umm Hānī', son and daughter of Abū Ṭālib. Their maternal uncle and aunt were likewise the best of all uncles and aunts: they were al-Qāsim, son of the Messenger of God, and Zaynab, daughter of the Apostle of God. The Prophet concluded: 'O God, you know that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn shall be in Paradise, their uncles and aunt shall be in Paradise, and those who love them shall be in Paradise, while those who hate them shall be in the Fire.'¹⁸

Abū Hurayra, the famous *ḥadīth* transmitter, related that often when they prayed behind the Messenger of God Ḥasan and Ḥusayn would jump on his back while he was prostrate in prayer. When he lifted his head, he would move them gently and place them beside him.

One evening, after prayers, Abū Hurayra offered to take the two youths home, but the Prophet wished them to stay. Soon, however, a flash of lightning illuminated the sky, and they thus walked in its light until they entered their home.¹⁹

The friends (*awliyā'*) of God, like the prophets, are favoured with

¹⁸ Al-Fuyrūzābādī, III, 187.

¹⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal, II, 513; al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, VII, 109.

miracles. These are not miracles proper (*mu'jizāt*), but rather *karamāt* (divine favours). The lightning incident was one such divine favour by means of which the Prophet wished to inform the community of the special status with which God had favoured the two Imams.

There is a unity between the Prophet and the *ahl al-bayt*, a unity not simply of blood, but also of the spirit. It is a unity symbolized by the *kisā'* event. It is, therefore, a unity of love, as the following statement of the Prophet clearly indicates. He said, as related on the authority of Salmān the Persian: 'Whoever loves Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, I love him, and whomsoever I love, God also loves, and whomsoever God loves, He shall cause him to enter into the gardens of bliss.' Likewise he who hates Ḥasan and Ḥusayn shall be consigned to the Fire, because both God and his Messenger will hate him, 'and a terrible punishment awaits him'.²⁰

Muslim hagiographical piety extended this unity and intimacy between the Prophet and his two grandchildren to include the angels of heaven. Thus Hudhayfa, a well known companion and traditionist, reported that the Prophet said: 'An angel is here who never came down to earth before this night. He sought permission from his Lord to come down and greet me, and to bring me the glad tidings that Fāṭima is the mistress of the women of Paradise, and that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the masters of the youths of Paradise.'²¹

There is no doubt that the special status of the Imam Ḥusayn in Muslim piety and devotion has in large measure been due to the Imam's great sacrifice of family, wealth, and life itself in the way of God. Ḥusayn's martyrdom—his courage, steadfastness, dignity, and true devotion in times of great crisis—have inspired Muslims of all walks of life. Ḥusayn has inspired the best poetry in all Islamic languages; even non-Muslim poets celebrated his great virtue and valour. Above all, however, the Imam Ḥusayn's martyrdom became a source of strength and endurance for Muslims in times of suffering, persecution and oppression. He has stood with every wronged man or woman before oppressive rulers, reproaching wrongdoers and encouraging the oppressed to persist in their

²⁰ Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, p. 221.

²¹ Al-Tirmidhī, II, 307.

struggle for freedom and dignity. The following encounter between Zayd b. Arqam, a venerable companion of the Prophet, and 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād is a living testimony to the struggle between illegitimate authority and the power of right. When the head of the Imam Ḥusayn was brought before him, Ibn Ziyād began to poke its teeth and lips with a stick.

Zayd protested: 'Take away your stick! For, by God, I saw the Apostle of God often kiss these lips.' Saying this, Zayd began to weep. Ibn Ziyād reprimanded him, saying: 'May God cause your eyes to weep! Had it not been that you are an old and senile man, I would have cut off your head.' Zayd then walked away, exclaiming: 'O men, you are slaves after this day. For you have slain the son of Fāṭima and set as *amīr* over you the son of Marjāna [i.e., Ibn Ziyād]. By God, he shall kill the best of you and enslave the most wicked among you. Perish those who accept humiliation and shame.' Zayd then said, 'O Ibn Ziyād, I shall tell you something that will enrage you even more. I saw the Apostle of God seating Ḥasan on his left leg and Ḥusayn on his right, and say, "O God, I commend them and the most righteous of the people of faith to your trust." How have you dealt with the trust of the Prophet, O Ibn Ziyād?'²²

Divine wisdom in creation can be best discerned, according to the Qu'ān, in the order of nature, and in the human individual and his society. Muslim hagiography has recorded the dramatic effect the death of Ḥusayn had on nature. Thus the famous traditionist al-Bayhaqī reported that when al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was killed, the sun was so deeply eclipsed that stars were seen at midday. People feared that it was the Day of Resurrection.²³ Naḍra al-Azdīya, a woman who was contemporary with the Imam Ḥusayn, is said to have reported: 'When al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was killed, the sky rained down blood, so that next morning we found our wells and water jugs filled with it.'²⁴

The memory of the martyred Imam has been kept alive and nourished by the tears of the faithful who vicariously share in the tragedy of the Imam Ḥusayn and his loved ones and friends. Here again, tradition has extended the grief displayed by the pious for

²² Ibn Hajar, p. 118.

²³ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunān al-Kubrā* (Haydarabad, 1344), III, 337.

²⁴ Ibn Hajar, p. 291.

the tragedy of Karbalā' to the cosmic order. Thus al-Suyūfī reports in his commentary on the verse describing God's compassion towards the ancient martyr John son of Zachariah that 'The heavens did not weep for the death of anyone except John son of Zachariah and al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. Its redness [at sunset] is the sign of its weeping.'²⁵

CONCLUSION

It has already been argued that there is an existential and all-inclusive unity between the Prophet and his daughter Fāṭima, her husband, 'Alī, and their two sons. This unity makes it impossible to discuss one without discussing all the others. We have, therefore, been concerned throughout this study with the Imam Ḥusayn in the context of this essential unity. It must be added, however, that the Imam Ḥusayn was especially close to the heart of his grandfather, the Prophet Muḥammad. It is of Ḥusayn alone that he declared: 'Ḥusayn is of me and I am of Ḥusayn. May God love those who love Ḥusayn.'²⁶ When *sūra* 108 (*al-Kawthar*) was revealed, the Prophet announced this great favour to his close companion Anas b. Malik, on whose authority this tradition is reported. Anas asked: 'What is *al-Kawthar*?' He answered: 'It is a river in Paradise, but neither those who violate my covenant (*dhimma*), nor those who shall kill the people of my House will be allowed to drink of it.'²⁷

Finally, Shī'ī tradition has always insisted on the great merit the faithful earn in making pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to the tomb of the Imam Ḥusayn and the tombs of the men who were martyred with him. Yet Sunni tradition has likewise seen great merit in this pious act.²⁸ The *ziyāra* to the tomb of the martyred Imam has acquired this great significance in all Muslim tradition because the Imam and his fellow martyrs are seen as models of *jihād* in the way of God. It is related that the father of the Imams, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, passed by

²⁵ See the commentary on 19: 13 in al-Suyūfī.

²⁶ Al-Tirmidhī, II, 306.

²⁷ See the commentary on *sūra* 108 in al-Suyūfī.

²⁸ Muḥibb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭabarī, *Dhakhā'ir al-'uqba* (n.p., 1356), p. 151. Note also the popularity of the Mosque of the Head of the Imam Ḥusayn in Cairo as a place of pilgrimage.

Karbalā' after the battle of Ṣiffīn. He took a handful of its soil and exclaimed: 'Ah, ah, on this spot some men will be slain, and will enter Paradise without reckoning!'²⁹

The spiritual unity of the *ahl al-bayt*, symbolized by the *kisā'*, is in turn a symbol of the unity of all Muslims. It is for the sake of this unity in faith and commitment (*islām*) to God and the truth that the Imam Ḥusayn sacrificed his life. He refused a partisan Islam when he refused to legitimize Umayyad rule. Because he refused humiliation, wrongdoing and deviation from the ideals of Islamic leadership as exemplified by the Prophet and his own father 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, the Imam Ḥusayn drew once and for all the distinction between a true *khalīfa* (representative) of the Apostle of God and the kings of this world. But above all, the Imam Ḥusayn and his fellow martyrs accepted God's bargain with the people of faith to exchange their lives and wealth for the eternal bliss of Paradise.³⁰ This divine challenge is no less relevant to the Muslim community today than it was fourteen hundred years ago. It invites us still to 'a garden whose breadth is greater than the heavens and earth, prepared for those who fear God'.³¹

²⁹ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Hajar al-Haytamī al-Asqalānī, *Tadhīb al-tadhīb* (Haydarabad [Deccan], 1325), II, 348.

³⁰ See 9: 111.

THE DEATH OF AL-ḤUSAYN B. 'ALĪ AND EARLY SHĪ'Ī VIEWS OF THE IMAMATE¹

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THE death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (4–61/626–680) has traditionally been seen by Muslims of all persuasions as perhaps the greatest single calamity that befell the community in its early history. Certainly among that portion of the Muslim community whose axis and very reason-for-being are the rights of the Family of the Prophet, the slaying of Muḥammad's younger grandson has continuously served to galvanize and replenish the self-identity and world-view of Shī'ī Islam. The clay of Karbalā' unceasingly leaves its impress on the face of the Shī'a, from the moment that Ḥusayn uttered his final prayer on its sands until now. For the Shī'a, all of history is stained by the blood spilt at Karbalā'. Yet they have also understood the killing of Ḥusayn as the dramatic climax of an even greater tragedy, that of the sabotage of Muḥammad's prophetic mission itself. Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, a leading savant of the Safavid era, alludes to this by his remark that 'Ḥusayn was

¹ This is an expanded version of a paper given at the Conference to mark the 1,400th anniversary of the birth of the Imam Husayn (London, July 6–9, 1984), held under the patronage of the Muhammadi Trust (see *Al-Serāt*, X/2 [Autumn 1984], 24–29). I am indebted to the kindness of Dr Mehdi Moḥāghhegh of Tehran for making available materials essential for the completion of this study.

killed already on the day of al-Saqīfa';² and in our times Imam Khomeini has expressed a similar view:³

The greatest disaster that befell Islam was the usurpation of rule by Mu'āwiya from 'Alī. . . This disaster was even worse than the tragedy of Karbala and the misfortunes that befell the Lord of the Martyrs (upon whom be peace), and indeed it led to the tragedy of Karbala. The disaster that did not permit Islam to be correctly presented to the world was the greatest disaster of all.

Such views may reflect the circumstances of Shī'ī polity since the era of the political ascendancy of Ithnā-'asharī (Twelver) Shī'ism. Yet in a much earlier period of their history the Shī'a had debated and discussed the significance of Ḥusayn's death in a manner that clearly reflected their particular circumstances in the first few centuries following the Imam's death.

The debate which the death of Ḥusayn provoked within succeeding generations of the Shī'ī community centered around the meaning and implications of the sufferings of the Imams, and eventually contributed to the crystallization of certain fundamental tenets of the doctrine of the Imamate (*imāma*). This process appears to owe much to the guidance of the fifth and sixth Twelver Imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-ca.114/676-ca.733) and Ja'far al-Šādiq (83-148/702-765). Since the active careers of these two leaders and theoreticians of the Shī'ī movement span over fifty years from the waning and collapse of the Umayyad dynasty till the early years of 'Abbāsīd rule, the centrality of that period for the elaboration of the teaching on the impeccability (*'iṣma*) of the *imām*, his humanity, his participation in the celestial realm of existence beyond death, and of how to reconcile God's justice with the oppression and wrong done to the Family of the Prophet, must be stressed.⁴ Such notions arose out of a definite messianic tension whereby the formation of the doctrine of the Imamate enshrined an

² Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* (Beirut, 1983, repr. of the Tehran ed.), XLV, 328.

³ *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, 1981), p. 200.

⁴ Syed H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London, 1979); E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmi Shī'ī Interpretations of Umayyad History', in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Urbana, 1982), pp. 145-59.

understanding of the *imām* in terms akin to an eschatological prophet figure.⁵ Al-Ḥusayn's death functioned as one basic point of clarification for the rôles of suffering, intercession, and apocalyptic retribution peculiar to the *imām*.

THE EARLY SHĪ'Ā

An appreciation of the main currents within the Shī'a during the century following the martyrdom of Ḥusayn (10 Muḥarram, 61/ 10 October, 680) is necessary. His death had a shock impact on the historical manifestations of the Shī'a under the Umayyads. Two immediate consequences of his death were the Tawwābūn, or movement of the Penitents (61–65), which was a completely Arab phenomenon,⁶ and the Kaysāniyya movement sparked by the revolt of al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqaḥī, 'who first mobilized the Persian *mawālī* in active participation, thus giving the Shī'ī movement a wider appeal'.⁷ Al-Mukhtār, whose revolt in Kūfa was catapulted into success by the passions generated by the Penitents, was apparently one of the first leaders to capitalize on the notion of the 'God-guided One', *al-mahdī*, and from a particular group among his followers (the *ghulāt al-Kaysāniyya*, i.e., the remnants of the old Saba'iyya living in Kūfa during the days of al-Mukhtār⁸) derived a number of early *ghuluww* movements—i.e., radical Shī'ī groups who held an 'exaggerated' view of the *imām*. These groupings traced the Imamate through Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 84 A.H.), the third son of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The Kaysāniyya impetus became canalized into the various groupings tinged by Mazdaean and Mazdakite milieus (e.g., the Harbiyya, Janahiyya, and Khurrāmiyya), the various groupings of the 'Abbāsīd Shī'a such as the Rāwandīyya, and

⁵ The term 'eschatological prophet' is used here from the perspective of history of religions. The figure of the Shī'ī *imām* represents an important development in the religious history of the Middle East, and its distinctive features in relation to, as well as in contrast with, earlier prophetic, saviour, and gnostic figures have yet to be delineated. For orientation, see the series of G. Widengren, *King and Saviour* (Uppsala, 1945–1955); and Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1918), pp. 291–313.

⁶ Jafri, *Origins*, p. 232.

⁷ *Ibid.*; W. Madelung, 'Kaysāniyya', *E.I.*, IV, 836–38.

⁸ W. al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyya ft Ta'rikh wa-l-Adab* (Beirut, 1974), pp. 120–21.

absorption into the rising tide of Ithnā-'aṣharī Shī'ism in Iraq. The key ideas of the Mahdi, *badā'*, *ghayba*, *raǰ'a*, as well as *nasy* (the explicit designation of an *imām*) and other important aspects of the radical religious theory of the Imamate first make widespread appearance with the Kaysāniyya and its cognate groupings.⁹ The peculiar eschatological ideology of neo-Kaysānī messianism was marked by its revolutionary orientation and tendency towards a type of mystical anarchy (e.g., the motif of revenge and the concrete political expectations which were both enveloped within the the Mahdi dogma), and made an explosive combination with 'Alid legitimism, thus insuring the widespread and permanent appeal of chiliastic political expectations in Islam.

It was this combination of a messianic ideology and legitimist Arab aristocratic elements which lay behind the 'Alid revolts of the Ṭālibite 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya and the Ḥasanids Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm ibnay 'Abd Allāh. The 'Abbāsīd party harnessed the energy of neo-Kaysānī millenarianism more efficiently than did the 'Alids, particularly in their exploitation of *mawālī* expectations. Two other major attitudes during the century following Ḥusayn's death must be mentioned: the party of Zayd b. 'Alī with his stress on 'Alid legitimism balanced by moderating overtures to the traditionalist and juridical circles, and the radical religious wing of the Shī'a represented by various extremist circles and revolts, and often led by men who had some sort of link with the Ḥusaynids Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (e.g., Bayān b. San'ān, al-Mughīra b. Sa'īd, Abū Maṣṣūr al-'Ijlī, and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb).¹⁰ Curiously, the line of Ḥusayn from his son 'Alī al-Sajjād onwards did not participate in any overtly political movement. These leaders neither promoted apocalyptic revolt, nor did they accept the generally held conceptions of authority, guidance and knowledge which were being elaborated and spread by the traditionist-juridical circles of the Hijāz and Iraq, preferring instead to enunciate their own

⁹ Madelung, 'Kaysāniyya', p. 838; S. Moscatti, 'Per Una Storia Dell' Antica Šī'a', *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 29 (1954), 262-65.

¹⁰ W. F. Tucker, 'Revolutionary Chīlīasm in Umayyad Iraq: A Study of the Bayaniyyah, Mughiriyyah, Mansuriyyah, and Janahiyyah Sects of the Extreme Shia', Ph.D. dissert., Indiana University, 1971; B. Lewis, 'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb', *E.I.*^{II}, I, 134; W. Madelung, 'Khaṭṭābiyya', *E.I.*^{II}, IV, 1132-33.

particular viewpoint and body of traditions on virtually all aspects of the burgeoning Islamic disciplines. Al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq were primarily responsible for formulating a coherent doctrine of the Imamate which was to provide the foundation of the Twelver school until our day.

The Ḥusaynid 'Alids were faced with a difficult situation in this task, even viewed from within the competing Shī'ī currents of their time. On the one hand, al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq had to consolidate and extend their own circles of followers who were being drawn to the activist revolutionary movements, by defining and defending their own family's claims to inherited legitimacy and authority against the competing claims of others. On the other hand, they had to offset the repeated ascriptions of the enthusiasts and adventurers who sought validation for their activities by appropriating certain key features of Ḥusaynid 'Alid teaching; this was accomplished through disciplining misguided followers, as well as attacking the pretensions and ideologies of closely related figures who had raised troubling questions in the minds of these two Imams' genuine following.¹¹ The importance of this double challenge for the elaboration of al-Bāqir's and al-Ṣādiq's theory of the Imamate still remains to be more fully explored, but certain features can be readily appreciated as familiar issues endemic to the early Shī'a as a whole. One of the earliest and most influential issues was the real nature of the death of an Imam, or of a prophet, and his continued existence after his death or disappearance.

IBN AL-ḤANAFIYYA, JESUS, AND THE QUR'ĀN

The view of the early Kaysāniyya that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya disappeared from view and was subsisting miraculously in a semi-paradisial condition on Mt. Raḍwa sustained by water and honey, and would make his reappearance as the the Mahdī (the doctrines of *ghayba* and *raja'a*),¹² propagated by their spokesmen-

¹¹ I hope to provide documentation for these assertions in a forthcoming work on the teachings of the Ḥusaynid 'Alids. See M. G. S. Hodgson, 'How did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian?', *JAOS*, 75/1 (1955), 1-13.

¹² Al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyya*, pp. 170-96; Fr. Buhl, 'Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah', *E.I.*, III, 671. I shall not discuss here the archaic belief that Muḥammad and/or 'Alī did not die and will return like Jesus. For this, and the

poets, was of course denied by the later Twelver school.¹³ One report relates a discussion between a certain Kaysānī, Ḥayyān al-Sarrāj, and Ja'far al-Šādiq, who questioned Ḥayyān about what his companions were saying concerning Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya:¹⁴

Ḥayyān: They say he is alive and is sustained (*ḥayyūn yurzaq*).

Šādiq: My father informed me that he was among those who attended on him during his final illness and who closed his eyes [at his death], who put him in his grave, and who married his women off and divided his inheritance.

H: O Abū 'Abd Allāh! Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya is like Jesus, son of Mary, in this community; his affair was made to appear [like one who died] to people (*shubbiha amruhu li-l-nās*).

S: Was his affair made to appear [like one who died] to his friends, or to his enemies (*shubbiha amruhu 'alā awliyā'ihī aw 'alā a'dā'ihī?*)

problem of the early Sabā'iyya, see: I. Friedländer, 'Abdallāh b. Sabā, der Begründer der Šī'a, und sein jüdischer Ursprung', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 23 (1909), 296–327 and 24 (1910), 1–46; 'Abdallāh Fayyād, *Ta'rikh al-Imāniyya wa Aslāfihim min al-Shī'a* (Beirut, 1975), pp. 92–110; al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyya*, pp. 119ff.; and also compare Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al-Saffār, *Bašā'ir al-Darajāt*, ed. Muḥsin Küche Bāghī (Qumm?, 1380, repr. Tehran, 1404), pp. 428–30.

¹³ Al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyya*, pp. 271–88. She points out that the Ithnā-'Ashari insistence on the death of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya was really aimed at rebutting the view that he, rather than the twelfth Imam, is the hidden Imam whose return as the Mahdī was awaited; loc. cit., pp. 284–85. Whether al-Qādī's view that all such reports are to be considered as later polemical fabrications should be adopted unhesitatingly, depends on one's understanding of the development of the *imāma* doctrine itself.

¹⁴ For the meagre information available on Ḥayyān al-Sarrāj, see al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqih al-Maqāl* (Najaf, 1350), I, 383, §3680, who points out that he should not be confused with Ḥannān al-Sarrāj, *wakīl* for Musā al-Kāzim in Kūfa and a leading Wāqif. The report is found in Ibn Bābawayhi al-Qummī, al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'ma*, ed. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1390), p. 36. The same report, with slight variants and omissions, is found in al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, in the recension of Shaykh al-Tā'ifa al-Tūsī, ed. Hasan al-Muštafawī (Mashhad, 1348sh.), pp. 315–16, §570. Kashshī provides a double *isnād* for his version, both going back to Hammād b. 'Isā al-Juhānī (d. 209) through Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī Khalaf al-Qummī (d. 299 or 301), the well known author of one of the earliest surviving heresiographical works, *al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq*. Ibn Bābawayhi gives one *isnād*, going back through Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī to Hammād, and then al-Husayn b. al-Mukhtār al-Qalānāsī. All the links in the *isnāds* of both al-Kashshī and Ibn Bābawayhi are deemed trustworthy; both Hammād and Ibn al-Mukhtār are reported to have relayed from al-Šādiq and to have authored books; see al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqih*, I, 343, §3063, and 366, §3317.

H: Rather to his enemies.

Ṣ: Are you claiming that Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Bāqir is the enemy of his paternal uncle Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya?

H: No.

Ṣ: Ḥayyān, you [and your companions] are shunning the Signs of God! Has not God, Blessed and Exalted, said: *We will requite those who turn away from Our Signs with an evil punishment because of their turning away* (6: 157)?

Whether this report be viewed as a later polemical argument, as al-Qādī implies,¹⁵ or whether it indeed reflects features of Kaysānī ideology of the first part of the second *hijra* century, the fact that Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya is likened to Jesus, and the Qur'ānic verse 4: 157 is evoked, is significant. Such an association apparently lived on in neo-Kaysānī circles until they were subsumed into the early Qarāmiṭa; under the events for the year 278, the historian al-Ṭabarī mentions a book of the Qarāmiṭa ascribed to al-Faraj b. 'Uthmān, in which a certain Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya was referred to as being 'the Messiah, and he is Jesus and the Word (*al-kalīma*) and the Mahdī . . . and Gabriel'.¹⁶

Here are the Qur'ānic verses which mention the death of Jesus: *And for their saying, 'We did slay the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God;'* whereas they slew him not, nor did they bring about his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them [like one crucified] (*shubbiha la-hum*); and those who differ therein are certainly in a state of doubt about it; they have no certain knowledge thereof, but only pursue a conjecture; though they did not slay him for a certainty. * *On the contrary, God raised him to Himself (rafa'ahu).*

¹⁵ Al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyya*, p. 285. One indication that this report could represent a later era than that of al-Ṣādiq might be the equation of the 'Signs of God' in 6: 157 with the Imams, assuming that this reflects later Twelver doctrinal developments. Yet there are numerous reports from al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq which make this identification; are they also fabrications?

¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879-1901), III, 2128. Al-Faraj also claimed that Christ appeared to him in the form of a human body (*al-masīh taṣawwara la-hu ft jismi bishān*). Another indication of the input of Kaysānī legacy into early Qarāmiṭi circles is Abū Sa'īd Ḥasan b. Bahrān al-Jannābī (murdered 301), the founder of Qarāmiṭian power in East Arabia, who 'won followers rapidly, perhaps among a group formerly attached to the line of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya'; Carra de Vaux and M. G. S. Hodgson, *E.I.*^{II}, II, 452.

*And God is Mighty, Wise. * And there is none among the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death (yu'minanna bihi gabla mawtihi); and on the Resurrection Day he [Jesus] shall be a witness against them. (4: 157-9)*

These verses have evoked varying interpretations among Muslims, the central question being whether the Qur'ān here categorically denies that Jesus was crucified or killed by the Jews, despite appearances, and was taken up to God. G. Parrinder asserts '... that the Qur'ān itself does not say that Jesus suffered in a false body (in the Docetic fashion), nor does it say that a substitute was made so that somebody else suffered in his place. . . . the cumulative effect of the Qur'ānic verses is strongly in favour of a real death, and a complete self-surrender of Jesus.'¹⁷

Yet the consensus of early Muslim exegesis was that Jesus was never crucified, that his likeness or image (*shabah*) was cast on one of his disciples who was then mistakenly crucified in his place, and that Jesus then accomplished a bodily ascension to heaven.¹⁸ The phrase in 4: 157, *shubbiha la-hum* ('he was made to appear to them [like one crucified]', or 'he was counterfeited for them'), was traditionally understood to refer to Jesus' enemies among the Jews who boasted of having killed him on the cross, thereby disproving his claim to be a divinely sent prophet. The point of al-Ṣādiq's question: 'Was his [Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya's] affair made to appear [like one who died] to his friends, or to his enemies?', and Ḥayyān's unequivocal reply: 'Rather to his enemies', reflects this Qur'ānic context. Apparently al-Ṣādiq implied by this question that the friends of Jesus (i.e., his disciples) were not led to believe in his death on the cross, as his enemies the Jews had been, but may themselves have denied that Jesus died on the cross.¹⁹

¹⁷ G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (New York, 1965), pp. 112, 121.

¹⁸ Benjamin T. Lawson, 'The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic Commentary; an historical survey'. Master's thesis, The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1980.

¹⁹ Sufi tradition yields the following interpretation attributed to al-Ṣādiq concerning 4: 157, where he restricts himself to the notion of the killing of Jesus, and distinguishes three types of killing: 'One is the killing of the world by abandoning it to one's enemies; one is the killing of sins, he is a lover; and the killing of wayward cravings, he is a knower ('*arif*'), and he has an exaltation in his killing just as God raised up His prophets (*lahu ft qatlihi rif'atun kamā rafa'a Allāhu anbiyā'ihī*). See

The next verse (158) contains the phrase *rafa'hu*, which has been interpreted to mean either that Jesus died yet was spiritually exalted in the sense of being honoured by God, or simply that Jesus was taken up to God and lives bodily in heaven, from whence he shall return at the end of time to help consummate the final eschatological drama alongside the *mahdī*.

The following verse (159) has also been variously interpreted, depending on how the pronoun 'his' in the expression *qabla mawtihi* was understood: either the pronoun 'his' refers to everyone of the People of the Book, who shall grasp the truth about Jesus and believe in him before their death; or, if the pronoun 'his' refers to Jesus, who did not die on the cross, then he is still living in the body and will appear before the Last Day, when there will be a final death of Jesus, and all will have believed in him before that. This latter view is ascribed to al-Bāqir: 'Jesus will descend to the world [from heaven] before the Resurrection Day, and the remaining confessors of Judaism or Christianity will all believe in him before his [Jesus'] death, and he will pray behind the Mahdī.'²⁰ There was also another interpretation current among Muslims in the first few centuries of Islam which gave a novel twist to the former view, namely that the pronoun 'his' in verse 4: 159 referred to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who was to make a 'return' at the end of time, when all the Jews and Christians would finally believe in him.²¹

The Qur'ān's description of the death of Jesus appears to refer to the differences that split Eastern Christianity in the time of Muḥammad, when the majority of the Semitic Christians were either Monophysite or Nestorian. Many scholars have maintained that the Qur'ānic verses in question show that Muḥammad was certainly aware of the opposing conceptions of the crucifixion held by the different Christian communities in his environment and their

Tafsīr al-Ṣādiq, MS Chester Beatty 5253, f. 33b (my translation differs from Lawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–53).

²⁰ 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Tayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Najāf, 1386–87), I, 158.

²¹ *Ibid.*; and Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī *Tafsīr*, ed. Hāshim al-Rasūlī al-Mahallātī (Qumm, 1370), I, 283–84, where reports from al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq are found to this effect. One report has al-Ṣādiq give the following *ta'wīl* of this verse: the *ahl al-kitāb* refers to the 'Alid descendants from Fāṭima, who would not die without accepting the imamate of the real imam (i.e., of al-Ṣādiq himself).

disputes about the nature of Jesus' humanity and divinity.²² Zachner, for example, sees the Qur'ānic position with regard to the two natures of Christ as being close to the Nestorian one.²³ H. Grégoire saw 4: 156ff as aimed at conciliating the Christian community of Najrān, who were Monophysites of the Julianist persuasion, and that the Qur'ān thus adopts their position 'of an apparent (the so-called 'phantasiast') crucifixion.'²⁴ Julian of Halicarnassus led the extreme Monophysites of the mid-sixth century C.E., and upheld the Aparthodocetist position that Christ was so glorified that his body was insensible to fleshly weakness and incorruptible,²⁵ denying any likeness in nature between the humanity of Christ and that of man. For Julian, since Christ's 'humanity' was sinless, imperishable and impassible (above suffering), then if he suffered at all, it was only by a conscious exertion of will.²⁶ While the Severians or moderate Monophysites accused them of upholding old heretical gnostic ideas of a docetic nature, it is more correct to call the Julianists 'Incorruptibilists' rather than 'Phantasiasts', since the Julianist version of Monophysitism asserted that Christ did not suffer and did not die on the cross, save by a voluntary act of will freely consented. The Julianists saw redemption as occurring at the moment of crucifixion when Christ made the supreme choice which imposed the suffering and death on

²² These included Chalcedonian on the confines of the Byzantine empire, Severian or moderate Monophysite in Abyssinia, Nestorian in Persian Iraq and recently introduced into Yemen by the Persian conquest there, and Julianist or extreme Monophysite in the important community of Najrān, not to mention certain gnostic and heretical circles.

²³ R. C. Zachner, *The Comparison of Religions* (Boston, 1958), appendix 'The Qur'ān and Christ', pp. 195-217, 203.

²⁴ H. Grégoire, 'Mahomet et le Monophysisme', in *Mélanges Charles Diehl* (Paris, 1930), pp. 107-119, 112ff.

²⁵ See Acts 2:31 and 13:35 for the incorruptibility of the body of Christ.

²⁶ Julian said of Jesus: 'Death is the portion of sinners. Then obviously He who was sinless could not really die'; W. A. Wigram, *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London, 1923), p. 155. The Julianists viewed Christ's body as uncreated, a sort of materialized godhead, from a soteriological perspective, and stressed the exaltation of the 'humanity' of Christ by assumption into the divine. In his controversy with Severus in Alexandria, Julian upheld the view that the body of Christ was incorruptible, while Severus, in turn, accused Julian of teaching Manichaean doctrines that the Passion was a 'fantasy'.

the cross which his 'humanity' never implied; whereas the moderate Monophysite position held that redemption was already foreseen by Christ's incarnation in a mortal, suffering body.²⁷

J. Jarry has criticized Grégoire's thesis on the basis that if the Qur'anic verses discussed above do actually indicate a 'docetic' view of Jesus, then how could this be an adoption from Julianism when Muḥammad knew the Najrānite community directly, not simply from the calumny directed against them by their opponents who charged them with being Phantasiasts believing in an apparent (or counterfeit) crucifixion in which Jesus did not really suffer on the cross?²⁸ Jarry is led, therefore, to suggest that either the Najrān Christians may have been penetrated by a particular wing of extremist Monophysites adhering to the teaching of Gaianus, who taught a transmutation of the humanity into the divinity in Christ; or that certain currents in Syro-Mesopotamian monasticism of the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. may have harboured elements of the Messalians, or the semi-heresy of the Audians, or of Manichaeism, whose doctrines approach in certain points gnostic views of an apparent crucifixion.²⁹ Jarry argues further that Gaianism itself was partly a dissimulated Messalianism which saw in the Julianist teaching on the incorruptibility of the body of Jesus their own conception of the spirituality of Christ's incarnation and thus of the glorification of the body.³⁰ There are problems involved in Jarry's thesis, such as interpreting 4: 157-9 as expressive of a docetic view of the death of Jesus, the assumption of a Gaianite diffusion into Najrān (or later into

²⁷ J. Jarry, *Hérésies et Factions dans l'Empire Byzantin du IV^e au VII^e Siècle* (Cairo, 1968), pp. 74-81.

²⁸ J. Jarry, 'La Sourate IV et les soi-disant origines Julianistes de l'Islam', *Annales Islamologiques* IX (Cairo, 1970), pp. 1-7; and Jarry, *Hérésies*, pp. 85-88.

²⁹ Jarry, 'La Sourate IV', pp. 4-7.

³⁰ J. Jarry, 'Le Gaianisme, un ramassis d'hérésies', *BIFAO* 63 (1965), 121-130, 126ff. Apparently certain Gaianites held the notion of a heavenly or glorified body of Christ simultaneous to his earthly appearance, and negated the reality of the crucifixion; Gaianus was considered a prophet and in some measure equivalent to Christ, an attitude recalling the prophetism of the Messalians. Concerning the vexed problem of Messalianism, see the references provided in N. Garsoian, 'Nersès Le Grand, Basile De Césarée et Eustathe de Sébaste', *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, n.s. XVII (1983), 147, n. 11.

Iraq), or even the presence of gnostic trends in Christian Arabia.³¹

All of these issues may well have less bearing on the Qur'ān itself than they do on the Kaysānī interpretation of these verses. The radical Shī'a attitude which drew an explicit parallel between Jesus and the *imām* or the Mahdi, and which throws light on the first major expression of the notions of *ghayba* and *raja'*, points to an 'exaggerated' understanding of the figure of the *imām*. While the contribution of old Arab ideals and glorification of the hero to these themes should not be lost sight of, nor the real events which shaped the self-awareness of the early Shī'a in the development of these notions be neglected, there remains an undeniable impact of religious ideas connected with earlier prophetic eschatological figures, particularly concerning the key notions of sinlessness and bodily incorruptibility.³²

AL-HUSAYN: WHAT KIND OF DEATH?

One incident in the drama of Karbalā' ties the ideas of death and punishment for sin together in a striking way. The scene is

³¹ Jarry, *Hérésies*, pp. 86ff., where he admits that 'l'allusion de la sourate IV est beaucoup trop brève et trop restreinte pour qu'on puisse dire avec certitude s'il s'agit d'une allusion à un julianisme dégénéré, au manichéisme, au messalianisme ou à une survivance du marcionisme.'

³² Besides the figure of Jesus, the prophet Moses also served as a model of the eschatological-prophet. The Messiah was often likened to 'a prophet like Moses' who would appear in the End Time for Judaism and Samaritanism. Certain strands of Judaic tradition held that Moses' burial place was not known, since he had actually ascended to heaven, from whence he would return as the second Moses; see W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 209-211. Josephus, for example, wrote of Moses: 'while, after having taken leave of the people, he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua on Mount Nebo, a cloud suddenly stood over him, and he disappeared, though he wrote in Scripture that he died, which was done from fear that people might say that because of his extraordinary virtue he had been turned into a divinity.' (loc. cit.) Legends of this kind, popularized in writings like the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Testament of Moses*, were apparently combatted by the Rabbis. See the statement attributed to al-Hasan al-Baṣrī: 'If the Children of Israel knew where [Moses'] tomb was, they would have taken [Moses and Aaron] as two gods alongside of God'; 'Umāra b. Wathīma al-Fārisī, *Kitāb Bad' al-Khalq wa Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, ed. R. G. Khoury (Wiesbaden, 1978), 51. For 'Umar's initial reaction to Muḥammad's death, that he would return like Moses, see P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la Fin du Monde* (Paris, 1911-1921), p. 57.

variously reported as a confrontation between the only surviving son of Ḥusayn, 'Alī al-Sajjād, and the Umayyad governor of Kūfa, Ibn Ziyād—or with the caliph Yazīd himself—in Damascus,³³ upon the entrance of the surviving members of Ḥusayn's family. Yazīd questions 'Alī b. Ḥusayn as to who he is, and then asks:³⁴

Yazīd: Did God not kill 'Alī b. Husayn?

'Alī: I have a brother who is also called 'Alī. The people killed him.

Y: Rather God killed him.

'A: God receives the souls at the time of their death (39: 42).

Y: And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought (42: 30).

'A: There befalls not any misfortune either in the earth or in your own persons, but it is recorded in a Book before We bring it into being—surely that is easy for God—that you may not grieve over what is lost to you nor exult because of that which He has bestowed upon you. And God loves not any conceited boaster (57: 22–3).

The theological implications of these quotations from the Qur'an take up at least two themes central to the Shi'a: the sinlessness of the Imam, and the fact that the misfortunes suffered by the Prophet's

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 372–73, 376–77; and al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Al-Ishād*, ed. al-Miyāmiwī (Tehran, 1377), pp. 228, 230. Both report two separate exchanges, the first in Kūfa between Ibn Ziyād and 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, the second in Damascus between the caliph Yazīd and 'Alī; al-Ṭabarī's source for both is Abū Mikhnaf. In the first exchange, after Ibn Ziyād asserts that God, not the people, had killed al-Ḥusayn, 'Alī responds: *God receives the souls at the time of their death (39: 42), and no soul can die except by God's leave, a decree with a fixed term (3: 145)*. The second exchange has Yazīd upbraid 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn for his father having sought to wrest the caliphal authority from him, which thus brought God's punishment upon him for his crime. Then 'Alī replies: *There befalls not any misfortune either in the earth or in your own persons, but it is recorded in a Book before We bring it into being (57: 22)*. Then Yazīd asks his son Khālid to make reply, and when Khālid is unable to, Yazīd tells him to say: *And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought, and He forgives many [of your sins] (42: 30)*. The version found in Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn*, ed. Ahmad Saqr (Cairo, 1368), p. 120, apparently conflates these two incidents into one between Yazīd and 'Alī in Damascus, and thus makes 'Alī have the last word.

³⁴ The combined version found in al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 120, is given here since it is more revealing of the ideological dilemma posed by al-Ḥusayn's death for the Shi'a doctrine of *imāma*.

Family are pre-ordained for them by God as a mark of election. The attribution to Yazīd of his employing 42: 30, *And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought . . .*, as proof that Ḥusayn's death came as a punishment from God for his crime of rebelling against the caliph, was a powerful argument which had to be countered. The replies attributed to al-Sajjād contain the seed of the later, fully-fledged rebuttals put forth by the Imams.

When several of al-Ṣādiq's companions questioned him precisely concerning this verse (42: 30), they asked:³⁵

Do you consider what befell 'Alī and the members of his family to be the consequence of what their own hands have wrought, yet they are a Pure Household free of sin?

to which al-Ṣādiq responded:

The Messenger of God used to turn in repentance to God, the Mighty, the Sublime, and seek His forgiveness a hundred times in every day and night, without any sin. For God, the Mighty the Sublime, favours His friends by conferring misfortunes, in order to reward them for the tribulations, without there being any sin on their part.

Al-Ṣādiq's reply makes clear that the afflictions of the prophets and Imams come to them from God, not as punishment for sin, but as a divine favour due to their sinlessness. Furthermore, the trials of the Prophet's Family are foreseen and willed by God as part of His salvational plan for creation, as can be seen from the reply al-Bāqir gave to Ḥamrān b. A'yan:³⁶

Ḥamrān: Tell me about the matter of the undertaking of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and their going forth [into battle] and their carrying out God's religion, and of what befell them of the tyrants' fighting them and defeating them, until they were slain or vanquished?

Bāqir: O Ḥamrān, God, the Blessed and Exalted, had foreordained that for them, and had determined it and decreed it, and enjoined it; then He

³⁵ Ibn Bābawayhī al-Qummī, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akhhār*, ed. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379), pp. 383-84; and 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-Iṣnād*, ed. 'Abd al-Mawlā al-Tarihī (Najaf, 1369), p. 103. See also Abū l-Faḍl 'Alī al-Ṭabarsī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār fī Ghurar al-Akhhār* (Najaf, 1385), p. 295; Ḥamrān questions al-Bāqir on the same verse.

³⁶ Al-Ṣaffār, *Basā'ir al-Darajāt*, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, XLIV, 276-77.

put it into effect. So by a prior knowledge of this from the Messenger of God to them, 'Alī and al-Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, God's blessing be upon them, rose up, and by a [certain] knowledge he who is silent from among Us remained silent (*bi-'ilmin ṣamata man ṣamata minna*). And if they, O Ḥamrān, when there befell them what came down of God's command and [His] granting victory to the tyrants over them—if they had asked God to ward that off from them, and if they had beseeched God to seek the elimination of the dominion of the tyrants, then God would have responded to them and would have warded that off from them. Then would the era of the tyrants have expired, and their dominion have vanished quicker than a tuned string which when severed is flung away! What occurred to them of defeat, O Ḥamrān, was not on account of a sin they committed, nor as a punishment for an act of disobedience by which they opposed God. Rather, [these things occurred to them] as 'stations' (*li-manāzil*), and as a mark of honour from God which He desired that they attain.

Here can be discerned an elaboration of the proof texts invoked by 'Alī b. Ḥusayn before Yazīd (and/or Ibn Ziyād). The death of Ḥusayn was foreseen and was the result of God's will, pointing to the deeper mystery of the status of the *imām*, who accepts oppression and injustice from the tyrants as a divine favour, thereby transforming his suffering into a higher meaning and purpose.³⁷

Nevertheless, the Shī'a were constantly reminded of this dilemma posed by Ḥusayn's death, of how to understand the outward failure of their cause when it was the true one, sanctioned by God who also willed the defeat and sufferings of their Imams. They could not fail to seek a satisfactory resolution of this dilemma, since the Umayyads and their supporters made of the day Ḥusayn was killed an event celebrated in sacred history and observed as a day of blessing. It appears that the Umayyads had traditions invented claiming that the day on which Ḥusayn was killed was the same day on which Adam repented, on which God had accepted David's penance, on which Jonah exited from the whale, on which Noah's ark came to rest on Mt. Jūdī, and on which the Israelites crossed the Red Sea.³⁸ In a long report, given here in full, one of th Banū

³⁷ See *Al-Serāt* X/2 (1984), 24–29, where I discuss the significance of al-Ḥusayn's death as conscious and active suffering.

³⁸ Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Al-Amālī*, ed. Faḍl Allāh al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (Qumm, 1373), pp. 77–78, *majlis* 27; this report is from Maytham al-Tammār, a companion of 'Alī b.

Hāshim, a descendant of al-Ḥarth b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib named 'Abd Allāh b. al-Faḍl b. Babbah al-Hāshimī, questioned al-Ṣādiq about this:³⁹

O son of the Messenger of God, how did the day of 'Āshūrā' become a day of calamity and grief, of anguish and lamentation, more than the day on which the Messenger of God passed away, and the day on which Fāṭima died, and the day on which the Prince of Believers [Alī] was killed? and the day on which al-Ḥasan was murdered by poison?

Ṣādiq: The day of al-Ḥusayn's murder is a greater calamity than all the rest of those days, for the reason that the Companions of the Cloak (*ashāb al-kisā'*), who were the most cherished creatures in God's eye, were five. When the Prophet departed from them, there remained the Prince of Believers and Fāṭima and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and they were a consolation and comfort for people. When Fāṭima passed away, there was a consolation and comfort for people in the persons of the Prince of Believers, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn; then when the Prince of Believers passed away from them, there was a consolation and comfort for the people in al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and when al-Ḥasan passed away there was in al-Ḥusayn a comfort and a consolation for people. So when al-Ḥusayn, may God overwhelm him in glory, was killed, not one of the Companions of the Cloak remained to be a consolation and comfort for people after him. Thus, his passing was like the disappearance of all of them, just as his abiding had been like the continuation of them all. For that reason his day became the greatest day of calamity.

Hāshimī: O son of the Messenger of God, then why was there no consolation and comfort for people in 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn [al-Sajjād], similar to what they had had in his forefathers?

S: Certainly 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was the 'Master of the Worshippers', and an Imam, and an Exemplary Witness (*hujja*) for creatures after his deceased fathers. However he did not meet the Messenger of God, nor did he hear him directly. His knowledge was a legacy from his father, from his grandfather, from the Prophet. The Prince of Believers and Fāṭima and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn had been observed by the people with the Messenger of God in continuous and successive situations. When they

Abī Tālib who lived until the era of al-Bāqir.

³⁹ Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ilal al-Sharā'i'*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1382) I, 225-27, *bāb* 162; quoted in *Biḥār*, XLIV, 269-71. On 'Abdallāh b. al-Faḍl al-Hāshimī, see Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-Ruwāt* (Qumm, 1331) I, 499.

looked at any one of them they used to remember his position with the Prophet, and the statement of the Messenger of God to him and about him. So when they passed away, people missed seeing the cherished ones of God. Only in the loss of al-Husayn was there also the loss of them all, because he passed away last of all. For that reason his day became the greatest day of calamity.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, then why have the masses (*al-‘ammah*) named the day of ‘Āshūrā’ as a Day of Blessing (*yawm al-haraka*)?

S *wept and said:* When Husayn was killed, the people in Damascus curried favour with Yazīd, and they invented reports for him [about who had been the killer of Husayn and how he had been killed] (*waḍa‘ū la-hu al-akhbār*), and they took rewards of money for so doing. Amongst what they invented for him was the affair of this day, and that it was a Day of Blessing, in order to turn the people away from mourning and weeping, misfortune and grief, towards joy and gaiety, delight and an inclination for it. May God be the judge between Us and them!

O son of my paternal uncle, verily that is less injurious for Islam and for its Family, than what a group has forged who arrogate to themselves our friendship (*mawaddatanā*) and claim that they owe allegiance to our patronage (*muwālātīnā*), and profess Our Imamate. They allege that al-Husayn was not killed and that his affair was made to appear to people as one who was killed (*shubbiha li-l-nās*) like Jesus, son of Mary. In that case, there is no wickedness upon the Umayyads, and no censure for their claim [that ‘Āshūrā’ is a day of blessing].

O cousin, whoever claims that al-Husayn was not killed, he has made a liar of the Messenger of God, and of ‘Alī, and has accused the Imams after him of lying in their reports about his murder! And whoever has accused them of lying, he is an unbeliever in God the Sublime, and his blood is lawful [to shed] for everyone who has heard that from him.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, then what do you say about a group of your *shī‘a* who are advocating that al-Husayn was killed [and is no longer alive]?⁴⁰

S: These are not my *shī‘a*; I wash my hands of them!

⁴⁰ This is how I understand the sentence: . . . *fa-mā taqūlu fi qawmin shī‘atika yaqūlāna bi-hi?* [i.e., *yaqūlāna bi-qatli al-Husayn*]—following the reading of al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, XLIV, 270. The text in *‘Ilal*, p. 227, l. 9–10, has, following al-Ṣādiq’s condemnation of this group, the phrase: *kadhā wa kadhā wa kadhā wa kadhā, ibtāl al-Qur‘ān wa-l-jannat wa-l-nār*, which appears to indicate some corruption of the text, where some words have been lost, or an interpolation by one of the *rāwīs* or the compiler.

H: Then what about the saying of God: *And surely, you have known the end of those amongst you, who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. So We said to them, 'Be ye apes, despised!'* (2: 65)?

S: Those ones were transformed (*masakhū*) into apes for three days, then they died, and did not beget offspring. The apes of today bear a resemblance to those, likewise swine and the rest of the *musūkh* [transformed creatures]; what is found of them today in a thing is its likeness; it is not permitted to eat its flesh.

May God damn the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa*, for they have made light of disobedience to God, and have disbelieved in Him, and have associated partners with Him. They have gone astray and led others astray, deserting from the performance of ritual obligations and the fulfillment of legal ordinances.

This report, whose *isnād* includes persons who are either unknown or tinged with *ghuluww*,⁴¹ emphasizes the magnitude of the disaster for Islam of Husayn's death. It is consistent with the fact that al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq encouraged and promoted the observance of the day of 'Āshūrā both as an occasion for solidarity among their followers and as a means to advance the rights of their family.⁴² 'Āshūrā' was seen to be 'the greatest day of calamity' in

⁴¹ The *isnād* connects the compiler Ibn Bābawayhi to al-Hāshimī by a chain of five links. The first two, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bašūshār and al-Muḥaffar b. Aḥmad, were both from Qazwīn, and the latter relayed it from Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Asadī (d. 312), one of the *bābs* for the hidden Imam during the minor *ghayba*; Māmaqānī, *Tanqīh*, IIb, 92, §10488. Al-Asadī relayed it from Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī, a companion of the ninth, tenth and eleventh Imams, who authored books entitled *al-Tawhīd* and *Navādir*; Sahl was excommunicated from Qumm by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-'Asharī, and went to Ray, being accused of extremism and taken to be weak in his traditions by the jurists, although this judgement was not always accepted by later authorities; *Tanqīh*, IIb, 75, §5396. The next link before al-Hāshimī is one Sulaymān b. 'Abdallāh, who appears to be unknown, for there are at least six companions of al-Šādiq with this name, all of them *majhūl*; see al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi'*, I, 382. Perhaps he is to be identified with Abū Muḥammad Sulaymān b. 'Abdallāh al-Daylamī, a Kūfan of Bajīla who dealt in slave boys from Khurāsān, was a companion of al-Šādiq, authored a book entitled *Yawm wa Layla*, and was labelled a liar and extremist by Najāshī; *Tanqīh*, IIa, 60, §5202. His son Muḥammad b. Sulaymān was also labelled extremely weak; *Jāmi'*, II, 122.

⁴² In general, consult Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Qawlawayhi, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn al-Amīnī al-Tabrīzī (Najaf, 1356), *passim*, and, e.g., pp. 330ff, *bāb* 108; for a description of the commemorative activities held at al-Husayn's grave by Kūfans in al-Šādiq's time, see *loc. cit.*, p. 326; Qur'ānic recitation, *qās* relating tales, women mourners, and reciters of *marāthī*.

the face of its celebration as a 'day of blessing' by the Umayyads. Yet al-Ṣādiq specifies that certain Shī'is who held radical views concerning the nature of Ḥusayn's death posed a greater danger to Islam and to the Family of the Prophet than even this lamentable practice of the Umayyads, namely those who likened Ḥusayn to Jesus by denying the reality of his death. Such views undermined the moral and ideological strength of the Shī'a by removing the onus of Ḥusayn's murder from the Umayyads, as well as attacking the credibility of the Imams who upheld the reality of Ḥusayn's sufferings and death.

It is clear that al-Ṣādiq refers to some of his own partisans as the people who held this erroneous view of Ḥusayn; they are not followers of another claimant for Imamate, but are among those who wished to be considered as his own followers. Furthermore, he condemns another group of *shī'a* who also claimed to be supporters of the cause of the Prophet's Family, yet who advocated that Ḥusayn was indeed killed and therefore is no longer alive. Such a view probably refers to the neo-Kaysānī groupings who believed that after the death of Ḥusayn, the Imamate was transferred to Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya. The gravity of these views as a distortion of the real nature and function of the Imam is behind the severity of al-Ṣādiq's condemnation, namely, that those who entertained these ideas could be lawfully killed. Then the question of *maskh* is connected in some way with the problem of Ḥusayn's death, and al-Ṣādiq is made to condemn the extremists who hold these views. Perhaps a glance at some of the legends and beliefs associated with the death of Ḥusayn or the Imams will help clarify the obscurity of these early radical views.

AL-ḤUSAYN'S DEATH: WHAT KIND OF LIFE?

Many legends evolved out of the recounting of the events of Karbalā',⁴³ such as those surrounding the severed head of Ḥusayn. One legend makes it to be a talking head, with Zayd b. Arqam hearing it recite 18: 9, *Do you think that the Companions of the Cave and al-Raqīm were a wonder among Our Signs?* as it was paraded

⁴³ Ibid., *passim*; M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978) chap. 4, 'The Wronged Martyr', pp. 120-139.

through the streets of Kūfa.⁴⁴ Hagiographical embellishments of this kind are striking for reliance on Christian motifs, in particular the explicit parallel between Ḥusayn and John the Baptist.⁴⁵ Of course, the 'Uthmāniyya, or opponents of 'Alī's family, had likened the blood of 'Uthmān, the third successor to Muḥammad, to that of John the Baptist, capitalizing on the theme of the vengeance demanded by the spilt blood of one dear to God.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 229; Ayoub, *Suffering*, p. 133. This reference to the *ashāb al-kaḥf* whom God raised up to life again after 309 years (18: 9–26) takes on an added significance in light of the bodily resurrection of al-Ḥusayn in the Return, discussed below. It is as if al-Ḥusayn's head was hinting at an even more wondrous resurrection than that of the Companions of the Cave. For other legends associated with the head, see Ayoub, *Suffering*, pp. 132–34, and 276, n. 161; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, XLV, 304.

⁴⁵ Ibn Qawlawayhi, *Kāmil*, *bāb* 68, 89–93; and al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, XLV, 201–219 *passim*; 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghumma fī Ma'rifa al-A'imma*, ed. Ibrāhīm Miyūnaji (Tabriz, 1381), II, pp. 179, 246. The resemblances between John and al-Ḥusayn in these reports include the fact that both of their killers were bastards, and that only for them did the sky weep and turn blood red. While al-Ḥusayn, as the Prince of Martyrs, is dubbed *shabih Yaḥyā b. Zakariyā'*, other reports link al-Ḥusayn with the deaths of other prophets: Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭā'ūs, *Kitāb al-Luhūf 'alā Qatlā al-Ṭufūf* (Sidon, 1347/1929), p. 10; al-Ḥusayn is to be killed like Abel slain by Cain, and his revenge will be the revenge of Abel over Cain, Ibn Qawlawayhi, *Kāmil*, pp. 75ff and 93; al-Bāqir tells Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik that on the night 'Alī was killed, blood was found under every stone, and the same signs were manifested for the deaths of Joshua, Aaron, Simon, 'Alī, and al-Ḥusayn, as well as when Jesus was raised to heaven, while another report has it that blood was found under the stones in the Temple of Jerusalem upon al-Ḥusayn's death. This detail about the Temple is pertinent, since Muslim legend tells of the blood of John the Baptist which boiled and would not subside till seventy thousand lives were slain to avenge him (*Bihār*, XLV, 299, from Ibn Shahrashūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Ṭālib*); in Shī'ī tradition, this is linked with the rise of the Mahdī who shall slay twice as many to avenge al-Ḥusayn, even killing the descendants of the killers of al-Ḥusayn on account of what their ancestors had done (*Bihār*, XLV, 295–98; and below p. xx). Early Muslim tales of the prophets contain reports on the purity and sinlessness of John, son of Zachariah, relayed from Muḥammad; Ibn Wathīma, *Qiyaṣ*, p. 311; and see Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *Al-Nūr al-Mubīn fī Qiyaṣ al-Anbiyā' wa-l-Mursalīn* (Beirut, 1978), pp. 396–401.

⁴⁶ Jāhiz takes up this parallel between 'Uthmān and John in his *Risālat al-Nābita*, ed. H. Sandūbī (*Rasā'il al-Jāhiz* [Cairo, 1352/1933, p. 293]). It appears that this parallel was part of the polemical arsenal of the 'Uthmāniyya party; see Ch. Pellat, *Le Milieu basrien et le formation de Ḡāhiz* (Paris, 1953), pp. 192, and 193, n. 1.

Another theme relevant here is that the flesh of the prophets and Imams does not decay or decompose in the earth after their death. Statements to this effect are found attributed to the Prophet, Muḥammad:

... Truly God has made our flesh inviolable [from decay] in the earth, so that it does not consume any of it,

and amplified by al-Ṣādiq:⁴⁷

There is no prophet nor any viceregent of a prophet who remains in the earth more than three days;⁴⁸ then his spirit and his bones and flesh are raised to heaven; yet [people] come to the sites of their traces (*mawāḍi' athārahum*), and salutations reach them from afar, and [the prophets and their viceregents the Imams] hear them before long at the sites of their traces.

The incorruptibility of the bodies of the saints is a theme familiar to the Orthodox Church and to medieval Christian legend, and is usually taken to be a sign of the purity or sinless conduct of the saint; it is rarely found in Jewish tradition.⁴⁹ The report from

⁴⁷ For the report on Muḥammad, see al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, pp. 443-44. For the report on al-Ṣādiq, *ibid.*, p. 445, *bāb* 13 of part 9; and *Kāmil*, pp. 329-30; both al-Ṣaffār and Ibn Qawlawayhi provide the same *isnād*, going back to al-Ṣādiq *via* Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Isā 'Alī b. al-Ḥakam, to Ziyād b. Abī al-Ḥalāl, a Kūfan companion of al-Ṣādiq, author of a book, and considered trustworthy (*Tarāḡh*, I, 453, §4293).

⁴⁸ The belief that the dead will resurrect after three days is met with in both Jewish and Christian tradition as well. Jesus' ascension or resurrection occurred on the third day after his crucifixion. As for Mazdean tradition, the soul, upon leaving the body, must wait three days for the divine decision; only then it crosses the Cinvat bridge.

⁴⁹ P. Saintyves (= Emile Nourry), *En Marge de la Légende Dorée* (Paris, 1930), pp. 293, 315, who points out that ecclesiastical legend has it that the body of the prophet Zachariah was found wholly conserved long after his death. On the few Jewish traditions about the incorruptibility of the body of saints, e.g., *Baba Bathra* 17a: 'There are seven persons upon whose body the decay of the tomb had no power over: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Miryam and Benjamin', see B. Heller's review of Nourry's book in *Revue des Etudes Juives* 98 (1934), 130, who adds that some authorities held that David was also given this grace. Heller treats the legend of the embalming of Joseph's body, and provides references and corrections to L. Ginzberg's discussion of this text (*Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia, 1925, II, 150]). Physical incorruptibility is taken to be a mark of spiritual impeccability. A famous example of the perfect preservation of a corpse was the legend of St. Catherine of

al-Šādiq just quoted specifies a spiritual and physical ascension; it preserves the notion of visitation to the graves of prophets and their viceregents, the Imams, by stipulating that prayers for intercession made at their graves do reach them, since they are alive in heaven.

This point is made again in another report from 'Abd Allāh b. Bakr al-Arjānī,⁵⁰ who accompanied al-Šādiq on the pilgrimage to Makka. On their way, near the village of 'Uṣfān, al-Šādiq points out to him a desolate black mountain called *al-Kamad*, beneath which lies a wādī of Hell that contains the murderers of Ḥusayn, and where they suffer terrible punishments. Al-Šādiq informs al-Arjānī that every tyrant and miscreant also suffers there along with Ḥusayn's killers.⁵¹ Finally al-Arjānī asks al-Šādiq:⁵²

Tell me about al-Ḥusayn, if he was disinterred, would they find anything in his grave?

Šādiq: O Ibn Bakr, what a tremendous question you have asked! Al-Ḥusayn is with his father and mother, and his brother al-Ḥasan in the house of the Messenger of God; they are being kept alive (*yuhayyūna*)⁵³

Alexandria, whose body was reputedly discovered at the end of the 8th century AD on Mt Sina in Arabia, lending her name to the well-known monastery in the vicinity; Noury, *Légende*, pp. 319–323. The Eastern Orthodox and Russian Church has always firmly maintained the incorruptibility of the bodies of saints (loc. cit., pp. 529–32).

⁵⁰ *Kāmil*, pp. 326–29, *bāb* 108; the last part of this report dealing with the bodily remains of al-Ḥusayn is also to be found on loc. cit., pp. 103, *bāb* 62 (whence *Bihār*, XLIV, 292). 'Abdallāh b. Bakr al-Arjānī [al-Arjānī, al-Barjānī] came from the region of Ahwāz, and is considered weak by some authorities. He is tinged with *ghuluww* for having expressed sympathy for Abū al-Khaṭṭāb; *Tanqīh*, IIa, 170, §6766. The next link in the *isnād*, 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Aṣammī al-Masma'i, a Basran who compiled a book on *Ziyārat*, was branded as an extremist; *Tanqīh* IIa, 196, §6927, where Māmaqānī expresses reservations on these judgements. Ibn Qawlawayhi relates this report from his teacher Ja'far b. 'Abdallāh al-Himyarī, on Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī, two of the most respected 3rd century traditionists and compilers.

⁵¹ These include Paul, Nestorius ('who taught the Christians that Jesus, the Messiah, is the son of God, and that He is three'; *Kāmil*, p. 327), Pharaoh, Nimrod, 'Alī's murderer, the killer of Fāṭima and her still-born infant Muḥsin, as well as the killers of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 329; the version on p. 103 is slightly shortened, with minor variants.

⁵³ The correct reading of this phrase should be *yuhayyūna kamā yuhayy* rather than *yuhbarūna* (*Kāmil*, p. 103, and *Bihār*, XLIV, 292): 'they are gladdened'. The reference is clearly to the Qur'ānic verse concerning the martyrs of Uḥud, 3: 169:

just as he is kept alive, and they are sustained (*yurzaqūna*) like he is sustained. If he had been disinterred in his [own] day, he would have been found [in his grave]; as for today, he is now alive with his Lord and is sustained [by Him].

He is looking at his camp (*mu'askarahu*) and he looks at the Throne to see when he will be ordered to carry it. He is suspended on the right-hand side of the Throne, and is saying: 'O Lord! Grant me what you promised me!' He looks to see his visitors [who visit his grave], and he knows them and the names of their fathers, their degrees and stations with God, better than any of you knows his own son and what is in his saddlebag. He sees the one who weeps for him [at his grave], and so he seeks God's forgiveness for him out of compassion, and asks his fathers [Alī and Muḥammad] to seek pardon for his sins . . .

Thus, Husayn is alive in heaven, from where he and the other members of the Prophet's Family intercede on behalf of their followers who make visitation to his grave. He is being 'sustained' or provided for by God in the Throne realm, for without his presence there, the efficacy of visitation to the site of his grave would be lost, and there would be no power of intercession on his part. At the same time, he is sinless, and his death came to him, not as punishment for any shortcoming, but as a special mark of election and honour from God, preordained as part of salvational history. Thus, al-Ṣādiq's condemnation of those Shī'a who claimed that Ḥusayn was killed and no longer alive, takes on more significance.

Yet the radical Shī'a held, as a concomitant to the idea of *ghayba* implied in the phrase *shubbiha la-hum*, the belief in the return of the Imam or the Mahdi as the climax of the eschatological drama, i.e., the notion of *raj'a* implied in the phrase *rafa'ahu*. It was a widespread belief among the early Shī'a that Ḥusayn would 'return' in the Last Days, before or with the Mahdi, in order to exact the

*Think not of those who have been slain in the cause of God, as dead; Rather are they living ones in the presence of their Lord, and are sustained (bal ahyā'un 'inda rabbihim yurzaqūna). Also compare 22: 58: And those who leave their home, for the cause of God, and are then slain or die, God will provide for them a goodly provision . . . The view that al-Husayn is alive and sustained makes explicit the implications behind these verses, and, as with the Kaysānī view of Ibn al-Hanafiyya, involves a particular understanding of the relation of spirit to body. See the discussion of *mawt* and *qatl* below.*

vengeance against his enemies so long denied him and as an integral part of God's Justice.⁵⁴ Sachedina has pointed out that the Twelver traditions on *raj'a* reveal a number of differing views including the question of the *raj'a* of Imams other than the Twelfth Imam:⁵⁵

Raj'a in the Imāmite creed means the return of a group of believers to this world before the final resurrection occurs, during the days of the Qā'im's rule, or before or after that period. The *raj'a* will take place in order to show the believers the rule of the righteous Imām and to exact revenge from the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt*. . . . The *raj'a*, then, can be interpreted as a prelude to the final resurrection. While the function of al-Mahdi is to commence the *zuhūr* and launch the revolution in the final days, it is 'Alī and, more particularly, Husayn, who will establish the Islamic rule after returning to life, following the *zuhūr*. The traditions of this aspect of *raj'a* are unanimous in according Husayn, the martyr *par excellence* of Shī'ism, the honour of initiating the rule of justice and equity, in collaboration with 'Alī and the Qā'im.

Various early Shī'ī literary compilations contain quite a few interesting reports which shed light on the different aspects of these beliefs about the *raj'a* of certain Imams. Perhaps the most valuable collection of such materials survives in a work by the eighth *hijrī* century scholar Hasan b. Sulaymān al-Hillī entitled *Muntakhab Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*. Al-Hillī's book is ostensibly an abridgement or series of extracts from the work of Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Khalaf al-'Asharī al-Qummī (d. 299 or 301), *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, although he included extracts from other early sources as well. Sa'd's book itself may have been an abridgement of his older contemporary, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Farrūkh al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290) who authored an important collection of traditions entitled *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*.⁵⁶ Al-Hillī devotes a chapter to

⁵⁴ A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shī'ism* (Albany N.Y., 1981), pp. 166-73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68, 171.

⁵⁶ Hasan b. Sulaymān b. Khālid al-Hillī, *Mukhtaṣar* [sic.] *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Uradabādī al-Ghurawī (Najaf, 1370). There is some confusion whether al-Hillī's abridgement is based on Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh's book alone, and whether Sa'd's work was a separate composition apart from al-Ṣaffār's *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*. Āghā Buzurg Ṭīhrānī, *Al-Dharī'a ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'a* (Najaf, 1355 *et seq.*), III, 124, and I, 91, maintained that Sa'd authored a separate work, also

the subject of *raj'a* called *bāb al-karrāt*, chapter on 'Recurrences' or 'Returns',⁵⁷ whose reports employ the term *karra* as an archaic synonym for *raj'a* based on a number of Qur'ānic proof texts.

Without entering into the complexities of these materials, it will nevertheless be essential to mention here one of the key points around which the entire discussion of death and 'return' revolves, namely the difference between *mawt* (dying a natural death) and *qatl* (dying by being killed). Several verses are invoked by al-Bāqir, for example, to show that dying and being killed are two entirely different things (3: 144 and 3: 158), and when he is asked about 3: 185, *Every soul shall taste death (al-mawt)*, al-Bāqir specifies that 'every believer has both a death-by-slaying and a death-by-dying, so that he who is slain is brought back to life until he dies, and he who dies is brought back to life until he is slain'.⁵⁸ It is precisely this eschatological context which lies behind the mystery of

entitled *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, which al-Ḥillī abridged in his *Mukhtaṣar*. The correct state of affairs is that Sa'd abridged al-Ṣaffār's work in his compilation, which should rightly be called *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*; and that al-Ḥillī later made a selection from Sa'd's abridgement, adding materials from other early sources, in his *Muntakhab al-Baṣā'ir*. See Muḥammad Taqī Dānīsh Paḏūh, *Fihrist Kitābkhāne Muḥammad Mishakāt be Dānīshgāh Tīhrān* 3, III (Tehran, 1335), pp. 1573-79, §1320, where this view is substantiated. It seems likely that (i) Sa'd's book *Mukhtaṣar al-Baṣā'ir* is not extant, since the existing copies of a work under this title (F. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 538, §30.2) are really copies of al-Ḥillī's compilation *Muntakhab*; and (ii) that al-Ḥillī's compilation *Muntakhab al-Baṣā'ir* is identical to the work *Kitāb al-Raj'a wa-l-Radd 'alā ahl al-bid'a* ascribed to him [see Dānīsh Paḏūh, loc. cit., p. 1577; also referred to as *Ithbāt al-Raj'a* in *Dharī'a*, I, 91, §439], and in which he amassed reports from al-Ṣaffār's *Baṣā'ir* through Sa'd's *Mukhtaṣar*, along with other ancient sources that dealt with *raj'a* and its related themes. Note that al-Ṣaffār's original *Baṣā'ir* contains very little material on *raj'a*. Al-Ḥillī exhibited a strong interest in eschatological themes, as another work of his attests, *al-Muḥtadīr ft Ithbāt Ḥudūr al-Nabī wa-l-A'imma 'inda-l-Muḥtadīr*. Al-Majlisī relies mainly on al-Ḥillī's *Muntakhab* in his *bāb al-raj'a* of the *Bihār*, LIII, 39-121.

⁵⁷ Al-Ḥillī, *Muntakhab*, pp. 17-29; also pp. 36-38, 41-43, 45-51, and 211.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18, and see pp. 19, 21, 25 (al-Ṣādiq on 27: 83); also see al-Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, I, 202, for parallel reports, where Zurāra b. A'yan, wishing to question al-Bāqir about *raj'a* yet disliking direct mention of it, then asked whether one who was killed was really dead. Again, when asked about 3: 185, *Every soul shall taste death*, al-Bāqir responded to Zurāra: 'Would you not kill a man if he slew your brother?' 'Yes.' 'If he should die a [natural] death, would you then kill anyone on his account? . . . Don't you see how God has distinguished between the two?' (loc. cit.)

Husayn's death, for it is possible to see why some of the Shī'a understood that Husayn was killed, but that he did not die.

'God's Days are three,' declared al-Šādiq, 'the day the Qā'im shall arise, and the day of the "Return" (*yawm al-karra*), and the Resurrection Day.'⁵⁹ Jamīl b. Darrāj asked al-Šādiq about 40: 51, *Surely We help Our Messengers and those who believe, both in the present life and on the day when the witnesses will arise* (*yawm yaqūmu al-ashhād*), and the Imam specifies that it refers to the return of prophets and Imams who did not attain victory and were killed, but who will be victorious at their return.⁶⁰ Another report has al-Šādiq say that 'the first one for whom the earth will split open and return to the world is Husayn b. 'Alī (a.s.), and the return (*al-raj'a*) is not for all but is limited; only the pure believers or the total idolaters will return'.⁶¹ While some reports make Muḥammad and/or 'Alī return to defeat their enemies, many others describe the return of Husayn who shall rule for a long time and who shall pass judgement on people before and after the Resurrection day, after having avenged himself on his enemies.⁶² Such reports heavily

⁵⁹ Al-Hillī, *Muntakhab*, p. 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19; see below, n. 72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24; see Sachedina, *Messianism*, p. 168. This report is related by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Ḥamrān b. A'yan and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb together, on al-Šādiq. Another report, *Muntakhab*, p. 21, on al-Bāqir, has it that the interrogation of the souls in their graves applies only to the pure in faith or total idolaters; see also *loc. cit.*, pp. 50, 211.

⁶² On al-Husayn's rule after his return, see *Muntakhab*, pp. 18, 22. Also *loc. cit.*, pp. 17–18, 26–27 (Muḥammad and 'Alī), 45–49 (*raj'a* of 'Alī and al-Husayn, then the Qā'im, 29 (multiple returns for 'Alī, termed *ṣāhib al-karrāt*), and 50–51 (al-Bāqir reports that al-Husayn said he would be the first to be drawn out of the earth and go forth to battle, angelic armies would descend to aid him, then Muḥammad and 'Alī and al-Hasan would descend from heaven to aid him, 'Alī handing over the sword of the Prophet to al-Husayn, who will conquer the world). See also *loc. cit.*, pp. 41–43 (taken from al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, II, 130–131), on 27: 83 *And [remind them] of the day when We shall assemble from every people a party from among those who rejected Our Signs, and they shall be formed into [separate] groups* (the Qur'ānic context is the sentencing of the unbelievers for the wrong they committed against God's Signs)—which al-Šādiq interprets as referring to the *yawm al-raj'a*, not the *yawm al-qiāma*. Furthermore, 'Alī is explicitly identified in some reports with the beast drawn out of the earth (*dābbatan min al-arḍ*, 27: 82) who will mark his enemies with a branding iron and the believers with a sign; see *Muntakhab*, p. 43, and al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, II, 130; al-Šādiq reads *taklīmuḥum* ('he will wound them') rather than

invoke the motif of the unrequited vengeance for the killing of 'Alī and Ḥusayn as a central feature of Shī'ī eschatology, and provide Ḥusayn with a parallel function to the Mahdī in the events preceding the End Time. It is as if Ḥusayn has taken on the rôle of precursor of the Qā'im, with both of them at last accomplishing and fulfilling what the former was not able to do. The parallel between Ḥusayn and John the Baptist in this regard may be relevant.⁶³ The

takallimuhum ('he will speak to them'). For this identification of 'Alī with the apocalyptic beast who executes God's wrath, and the alternative reading of *taklimuhum*, see *Bihār*, LIII, 100, 125–28. This is a reversal of roles from the older Judaeo-Christian image of the beast who 'seals' the believers and unbelievers; see Revelation 13:16ff, and consult W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, trans. A. H. Keane (London, 1896), pp. 200–202. Also see the reports via Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī on al-Bāqir to the effect that al-Ḥusayn (termed *al-Muntaṣir*) will rule for 309 years (see above n. 44, on the Companions of the Cave) after the rising of the Qā'im, then he will be followed by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (termed *al-Saffāh*), both of whom shall execute vengeance; *Bihār*, LIII, 100–101, 103–104; reports from al-Hillī, *Munakhab*, and from Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba* (Qumm, 1385), p. 286, and al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisās*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Teheran, 1379), pp. 257–58. It was probably due to beliefs of this kind among revolutionary Kaysāni circles, that the first Abbāsīd ruler dubbed himself 'al-Saffāh'.

⁶³ Early Jewish-Christian tradition saw John the Baptist as Elijah in the rôle of precursor to Jesus (Matt. 11: 13–15, Mark 9: 11–13, Luke 1: 7). For the return of Elijah, associated with the resurrection of the dead, and John/the new Elijah as a suffering servant, or Jesus as John brought back to life, see Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition*, trans. M. Boyes (New York, 1958), pp. 98–99, 106–108; and J. Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 15–16, 152–54, 195–98, 341–56. The explicit comparison between John and al-Ḥusayn would make al-Ḥusayn 'return' to play the rôle as precursor of the Qā'im, like Elijah/John to the Messiah; but this rôle is assigned to Muḥammad and 'Alī as well in some archaic reports. See also the salutations pronounced upon John and Jesus in the Qur'ān (19: 15 and 19: 33), which include the day of their resurrection. Another dimension of the John/al-Ḥusayn parallel is the paradigm of the suffering servant, evoked by al-Ṣādiq in this way (Abū al-Faḍl 'Alī al-Tabarsī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, p. 286): 'When God loves a servant, he instigates people to say of him that for which He shall reward him and by which He shall make them err. And when He hates a servant, He sows love in the hearts of the servants so that they say of him what is not in him, and thus He causes both them and him to err. Who was more beloved of God than John, son of Zachariah? Then He incited against him everyone you saw, until they did to him what they did to him. And who was more beloved of God than al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī? Then He incited against him some of the people until they slew him. It is not as they said [i.e., God did not punish al-Ḥusayn for a sin by causing him to be killed].'

ultimate victory of the Imams, the promised success and vindication of the rights of the Prophet's Family, was to be consummated in the terrible battles of the eschaton, even while their heavenly dominion was assured; according to al-Šādiq, the Imams are given 'the sovereignty of paradise and the sovereignty of the Return (*mulk al-Karra*)'.⁶⁴

The belief in *raja'* was a sore point for many of the followers of al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq, who were accused of holding heretical views concerning bodily resurrection. Several reports make clear the predicament of some of their leading disciples in the face of debates with opponents who raised doubts in their minds about this belief.⁶⁵ Al-Bāqir maintained that the faithful would be returned to bodily life in this world until those who had died would be killed and those who had been killed would die, and that this was part of God's omnipotence (*al-qudra*); furthermore, he attacked the 'Qadariyya' for denying this.⁶⁶ Yet the early Shī'ī belief in a this-worldly bodily return before the Judgement Day, central to the execution of God's Justice as vengeance against the enemies of the Family of the Prophet, was rivalled by another, more extreme view, which held the transmigration of the soul in different bodies (*tanāsukh*).⁶⁷ This view was widespread enough to elicit al-Šādiq's

⁶⁴ Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–24 *passim*. The followers of these two Imam who are known to have been condemned for belief in *raja'* included Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī (see W. Madelung, *E.I.*^{II}, suppl. 3/4, 1981, 232), Ḥārith b. Ḥasīra al-Azdī al-Kūfī, and Mu'min al-Tāq.

⁶⁶ When questioned about *al-karra*, al-Bāqir stated: '... that is [God's] omnipotence (*al-qudra*), so do not disavow it'; and he rebuked the Qadariyya for rejecting *raja'* (*Muntakhab*, 20, 22, 135–37: the *qadari* will be resurrected as an ape or swine). Other reports on al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq have them caution their followers against discussing or propounding views on *raja'* on polemical occasions, even counselling them to admit that they used to hold the belief in it but now no longer do so; *loc. cit.*, p. 24.

⁶⁷ B. Carra de Vaux, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1961), p. 572; Sachedina, *Messianism*, p. 167 (summarizing al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, I, 114); and I. Friedländer, 'The Heterodoxies of the Shī'a in the presentation of Ibn Hazm', *JAOS* 29 (1908), 23–30. The early *Ghulāt* or radical Shī'a speculated on *ḥulūl* (the descent or indwelling of the divine in certain men), and held the doctrine of *maskh* (the passage of the soul into the bodies of animals), which is a more limited application of the notion of metempsychosis.

emphatic condemnation of the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa* quoted above.

One report in the *Tafsīr* ascribed to the Imam al-'Askarī connects this doctrine of *maskh* (transmigration of the souls of men into the bodies of animals as punishment for sin) with both the Imams 'Alī b. Ḥusayn al-Sajjād and al-Bāqir.⁶⁸ According to it, al-Sajjād used to relate the tale of the transgressors of the Sabbath who went fishing (7: 163-6) and were punished by transformation or deformation into apes for their insolent rebellion; then the Imam would compare their punishment to what is in store for the killers of his father Ḥusayn.⁶⁹ Another report attributed to al-Ṣādiq, from the *Kitāb al-Tasallī* of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn b. Dūl al-Qummī (d. 350),⁷⁰ describes how the *kāfir* will be interrogated at his death by Muḥammad, 'Alī, and the Angel of Death, and if he is found to hate the Prophet's family by denying the *walāya* of 'Alī, he is then punished in Hell where his spirit suffers tortures in the mountain of *Barahūt*.⁷¹ After being subjected to every loathsome

⁶⁸ *Bihār*, XLV, 295-96 (taken from the *Tafsīr* of the Imam al-'Askarī); also found in Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, II, 40-41. It must be borne in mind that belief in *maskh* was widespread in the first few centuries of Islam, as the reports in Muslim, al-Bukhārī, and others attest, which make transformation into apes and swine to be punishment for a variety of sins; see 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar Tadḥkirat al-Qurṭubī* (Iḥlab, 1395), pp. 184-85, 189; and Ibn Wathīma, *Qisaṣ*, pp. 276-79, for the tale of the seven year ordeal of *maskh* endured by Bukht Naṣar as punishment for his destroying the Temple at Jerusalem, during which he was transformed into the form of every kind of living creature. Similar notions are found today, e.g., the belief among many lower-class Americans '... that cripples and the deformed are really "reincarns", being punished this time around for misdemeanors committed in a previous life' (P. Fussell, *Class* [New York, 1983], p. 172).

⁶⁹ The Qur'ānic tale of 'men into apes' invoked by al-Sajjād apparently reaches back to an old Jewish legend, only traces of which can be detected in Jewish lore; see Ginzberg, *Legends* I, 180, and V, 203; I, 123, and VI, 85, §452 (legend that Moses transformed the Sabbath breakers into apes). For the Shī'ī versions of this tale, see al-Jazā'iri, *al-Nūr al-Mubīn*, pp. 355-58.

⁷⁰ Quoted in *Bihār*, XLV, 312-13. On the *Kitāb al-Tasallī* and its author, see *Dharī'a*, IV, 177; Abū-l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* (Qumm, 1398), pp. 65-66; and Māmaqānī, *Tauqūh*, I, 82, §475.

⁷¹ For the eschatological mountain, or wādī, of *Barahūt*, see also al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 424. It is the place in hell where the enemies of the Prophet's Family suffer exquisite tortures. Compare the vale of hell beneath Mt. Kamad (above, p. xx), and see al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar*, pp. 105-107, for the topography of hell, its various pits,

filth and deformed into various 'vehicles' (*murakkibāt*, i.e., bodily transformations), the *kāfir* is finally resurrected upon the arising of the Qā'im, who shall cut off his head. Al-Šādiq adds that this is the meaning of 40: 11, *Our Lord, You have caused us to die twice, and You have given us life twice . . .*, and he declares that 'time will not end before our enemies are metamorphosized outwardly (*maskhan zāhiran*), when the man from them shall be deformed in his lifetime into an ape or swine, and a harsh punishment is behind them'.⁷² Numerous other reports from both al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq underline the fact that the Qā'im will slay in revenge for Ḥusayn all the descendants of the killers of Ḥusayn, without any mercy, on account of what their ancestors had perpetrated.⁷³

furnaces, valleys, etc. The stress upon the certain punishment awaiting their enemies found in Shī'i literature is very marked, and there are a number of code-words employed to refer to certain key figures, e.g., *Qunfudh* ('hedgehog') for (?) Abū Bakr (see Appendix II, end). The point is that there is no divine forgiveness or intercession shown to the killers of al-Ḥusayn, or the implacable enemies of the Prophet's Family. These terrible scenes are matched only by the fantastic beatitudes promised to the faithful followers of the Imams. See below, n. 89.

⁷² *Bihār*, XLIV, 312-13. Here the final emphasis is on a this-worldly punishment, probably in the days of the *karra* or al-Ḥussayn and the return of the Qā'im. The *maskh* of their enemies would thus be both other-worldly ('in the spirit' in hell) and this-worldly ('in the body' upon their resurrection in the *raja'*). Al-Majlisī notes at the conclusion of this report that al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (one of the links in its *isnād*) did not object to this report, despite its strangeness, only commenting that the Imāmiyya school denies that the *rūh* can adhere to another body (i.e., *ḥulūl*), not that one's body can change its material form (i.e., *maskh*). See Sachedina, *Messianism*, pp. 167-71, for the views of Twelver school thinkers on the subject of *raja'*. That the notions of *maskh* and *raja'* were complementary can be seen in a reputed exchange between Mu'min al-Ṭāq (= Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Nu'mān, a Kūfan money-changer and companion of al-Šādiq) and Abū Ḥanīfa: Abū Ḥanīfa mocked Mu'min al-Ṭāq about his belief in *raja'*, suggesting that he lend him 500 dinars, and that he would reimburse him when they both were returned to life again. Mu'min al-Ṭāq had the last word by replying that he required a guarantee that Abū Ḥanīfa would be returned in the form of a man, since he could not collect his debt from an ape; Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 228, and Ṭabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, II, 148.

⁷³ *Bihār*, XLV, 295-99; *Kāmil*, p. 64; 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, I, 86-87 (on 2: 193 . . . *no unbending hostility [is allowed] except against the wrongdoers*). This position naturally led to theological difficulties with other schools of thought (see Sachedina, *Messianism*, pp. 170-71). Among Sunni thinkers views also differed as to whether al-Ḥusayn's killers might find forgiveness, e.g., al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 158.

These notions of bodily resurrection for the purpose of vengeance and punishment in this world are thus central to the early Shī'ī doctrine of *raj'a* or *karra*. This is illustrated in a query addressed to al-Ṣādiq by a certain 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥusayn:⁷⁴

What do you say concerning *al-karra*?

Ṣādiq: I say about it what God, Mighty and Majestic, said . . . : *then that, indeed, would be a losing return* (79: 12), if they returned to this world [after having died] and were not able to accomplish their blood revenge [i.e., the pagan Arabs scoffed at the claim of the resurrection of bodies, since if they were truly resurrected to their former state, then so would those whom they had killed in revenge, thus obviating their vengeance].

'*Abd Allāh*: God says: *It will only be a single cry, and behold! they will all remain awake at night* (*idbā hum bi-l-sāhira*) (79: 13-14)?

Ṣ: When [God] takes revenge on [those who scoff at the resurrection of bodies], and the bodies die, then the spirits remain awake watching at night, they do not sleep nor die (*baḡiyat al-arwāhu sāhiratan lā tanāmu wa lā tamūt*).

Thus underlying the notion of *al-karra* is a body of beliefs dealing with the relation of the spirit to the body which served to justify the conviction in a spiritual subsistence after death, a bodily resurrection in this world, a distinction between *mawt* and *qatl*, and for some, a belief in transmigration as a punishment for sin. These notions spring out of an understanding of man which involves the concept of *ḥulūl*, a hallmark of extremist Shī'ī groups, and which has often been linked with incarnationist teachings,⁷⁵ but this would take us far from the limits of the present study.

THE DOCTRINAL IMPACT OF ḤUSAYN'S DEATH

Forcing the Imams to rebut divergent views among certain wings of the early Shī'ī movements concerning the nature of the Imam facilitated the resolution of a pressing ideological and theological dilemma. How were the Shī'a to understand the function and rôle of

⁷⁴ Al-Ḥillī, *Muntakhab*, p. 28. The *rāwī*, Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥusayn, who relays the conversation between his father and the Imam, seems to be unknown.

⁷⁵ See nn. 67, 72 above; and the discussion of the term *shaba* below. For a listing of radical Shī'a groups that held this doctrine, see G. C. Anawati and L. Massignon, *E.I.*^{II}, III, 571.

the Imam as the oppressed, the wronged, the unjustly afflicted—if all this came to him at God's hands and through God's will, being preordained from before history? If the rights of the Family of the Prophet were divinely sanctioned, and the Imamate a divinely appointed office requiring obligatory obedience and dependent on God's aid and approval, then how could their outward failure be countenanced? Two factors must be borne in mind in order to appreciate the answers to this dilemma provided by the Husaynid 'Alids. First, their opponents had attacked their claim to divinely sanctioned authority by arguing that Husayn's death was merely punishment for sin (i.e., the crime of disobedience to the ruler), going as far as marking the event as a 'day of blessing'. Secondly, an influential view had taken root within the Shī'a which attempted to provide an answer to this dilemma by adopting an exaggerated view of the Imam, seeing him as beyond suffering, even beyond death, thus embracing the myth of his *ghayba* in this world and hoping for its realization upon his return in the near future. The attraction of this radical vision was powerful during the century following Husayn's death, largely thanks to the forces unleashed by the Kaysānī movement and the prophetic parallels employed to substantiate this myth. The radical viewpoint consistently reappeared even within Twelver circles, where the *wāqif* tendency emerged to await the return of one or another Imam. Ultimately it was this radical attitude which was formally adopted in the case of the twelfth, or hidden, Imam by the Twelver school.

In death, Husayn came to loom larger than life in the consciousness of the Shī'a. In fact, it can be argued that Husayn came to serve as a paradigm for the later Imams in his rôle as heavenly intercessor to whom the prayers and elegies offered at his grave would unfailingly be heard and a response evoked. No other Imam of the Twelver line seems to have become the focus of ritual mourning visitation as early as Husayn, if the Prophet himself is discounted,⁷⁶ and allowance made for the relatively late fixing of 'Alī's grave at al-Gharīy in Najaf during al-Ṣādiq's later years.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See *Kāmil*, p. 321, §9, for the *ziyāra* to al-Husayn in the context of visiting the Prophet's tomb in Medina.

⁷⁷ Muḥammad al-Husayn al-Muẓaffarī, *Al-Imām al-Ṣādiq* (Najaf, 1369), I, 139–44. Ja'far also saw to the construction of a cenotaph in the cave where 'Alī's

Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān (d. 413) has authoritatively summarized the later Twelver school doctrine concerning the condition of the Imams after their death:⁷⁸

I say that the Messengers of God, the Exalted, are men, and His Prophets and the Imāms among His successors are created and fashioned; sufferings affect them and enjoyments occur to them; their bodies grow with nourishment and diminish with the passage of time; death undoes them and dissolution overtakes them. The consensus of the people of God's unity [i.e., the Twelver school] agrees on this belief. Yet the ones affiliated with [the doctrine of] *tafwīd* (delegation of authority from God to Muḥammad to the Imam, to a pretender) and the classes of the *ghulāt* have disagreed with us about it.

As for their state after death, [we hold that] they are transferred from beneath the earth and then inhabit the Garden of Allāh in their bodies and their spirits. Thus, they exist in [paradise] alive and live a life of ease and comfort until the Day of Reckoning . . .

Al-Mufīd goes on to affirm that the Prophet and the Imams are fully cognizant of what their community does, and reward the pious with miracles; they hear the prayers of their *shī'a* in this world recited at their graves, no matter how distant. And he refers to 3: 169 as a proof text for their continued existence after death.⁷⁹ Even as al-Mufīd attacks the *ghulāt* for denying that the Imams undergo bodily dissolution and death, he upholds their paradisiacal subsistence and celestial presence as necessary for their intercessory rôle.

The manner of the spiritual subsistence of the Imams after death implicated in their transference to paradise both in body and spirit, approaches the notion of ascension as seen previously in the case of Jesus. The radical Shī'a indulged in speculations about this celestial realm of existence, viewing it as a resumption of a mode of existence enjoyed by the prophets and Imams previous to their earthly existence—in the form of light bodies, or phantoms of light,⁸⁰ and variously termed *zill*, *ashbāḥ* (pl. of *shabāḥ*), or simply

body was said to lie.

⁷⁸ Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*, ed. Faḍl Allāh al-Zanjānī, 2nd ed. (Tabriz, 1371), p. 45; also quoted in *Bihār*, XXVII, 301–302.

⁷⁹ See n. 55 above.

⁸⁰ See H. Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Shia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich and München, 1982), pp. 240–74, 284–356 (on the Kūfan *ghulāt* tradition

ajsād nūrāniyya. The notion that the Day of the *Karra* marks a dissolution, or refining, of things back to their original image, is found in a report taken from a *Kitāb al-Karra* of apparently unknown authorship;⁸¹ al-Šādiq comments on 51: 13, *The day when they [the unbelievers] will be tormented with the torment of the Fire*:

They will be fragmentized (*yukassirūna*) in the Return (*al-Karra*) just as gold is refined so that everything may be returned to its likeness (*hatta yarji'a kulla shay'in ilā shabahihī*). [And the *rāwī* adds:] 'That is to say, to its true essence (*ilā haqiqatihi*).

Furthermore, the view that Ḥusayn did not physically suffer, despite his terrible injuries, occurs in conjunction with the notion of his eschatological return. Al-Bāqir related how Ḥusayn informed his companions at Karbalā' of the Prophet's prediction concerning his death there, as well as of his return and his future battles where he wields the sword of the Prophet succoured by angelic armies; Muḥammad is depicted as telling Ḥusayn:⁸²

'... You shall be martyred in [Iraq], and a group of your companions shall be martyred with you. They will not experience the pain of the touch of iron.'—And then he recited: *O Fire, be [a means of] coolness and safety for Abraham*, (21: 69)—'the combat shall be a means of coolness and safety for you and for [your companions].'

This assertion is not in harmony with al-Muḥḍ's statement that the Imams do indeed experience suffering, a doctrine that is relevant to the notion of *'iṣma*.⁸³ More commonly met with, however, are descriptions of the self-possession and fearlessness displayed by Ḥusayn during the events of Karbalā'.⁸⁴

and the Nuṣayriyya); U. Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light, Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad', in *Israel Oriental Studies V* (1975), 62–119; and Ayoub, *Suffering*, pp. 245–49 (on al-Ḥusayn's ascension to heaven in the Kūfan *ghulāt* tradition).

⁸¹ Al-Hillī, *Muntakhab*, p. 28; I have not found mention the *rāwīs* Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayārī and 'Abd Allāh b. Qabiṣa (Qubayṣa) al-Muḥallabī in the Twelver bio-bibliographic works.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51; see pp. 36–38, where the same report is given *via* Sa'd b. Hibbat Allāh al-Rāwandī, *Al-Kharā'ij wa-l-Jarā'ih*.

⁸³ See *Al-Širāt X/2* (1984), 27ff.

⁸⁴ E.g., al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār*, p. 288, where al-Sajjād relates how al-Ḥusayn encouraged his companions, saying: 'Be steadfast... What is death

The radical notion of Ḥusayn being above physical suffering should be viewed in the context of the purported ascension of Ḥusayn, either bodily or as a light-body, and the substitution of someone else to suffer in his place. The name of Ḥanzala b. As'ad al-Hamadānī al-Shabāmī is mentioned as the companion upon whom the likeness or image (*shabah*) of Ḥusayn came to rest at Karbalā' while Ḥusayn himself ascended to heaven.⁸⁵ This view was held by certain radical circles in the Sawād of Kūfa, and was reputedly condemned by the eighth Imam 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818); again, the parallel with the ascension of Jesus was invoked. Other statements condemning the belief that Ḥusayn did not die or was not killed (i.e., did not suffer and was raised to heaven) stem from the period of the minor *ghayba* of the twelfth Imam (260–ca.329/874–941), and are given below in Appendix I. This later era was marked by a different, more rationalistic type of discourse, as can be seen in the report from Ḥusayn b. Rūh al-Nawbakhtī given in Appendix Ic. The fact that this formative period of doctrinal crystallization within the Twelver school witnessed the repeated condemnation of such views may lead one to question whether al-Riḍā's statement (Appendix Ia) is a later back projection. Yet we know too little about the circles of the Kūfan *ghulāt* during the late 2nd–late 3rd/8th–9th centuries to be entitled to an opinion.

The question of how an emerging 'orthodoxy' gained a consensus within Imāmiyya circles during this period is obscure; at the very least, the fact that al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq were forced to deal with these issues surrounding Ḥusayn's death testifies to their antiquity and to the vitality of the radical Shī'a legacy.

The significance of the parallel between John the Baptist and Ḥusayn has been touched upon;⁸⁶ in later tradition, this was

but a bridge that carries you over suffering and adversity to the spacious garden and everlasting felicity? Which of you is averse to be transferred from a prison to a palace? And for your enemies, death is only like one who is transported from a palace to a prison and punishment.'

⁸⁵ Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn Akhbār Al-Riḍā*, ed. Mahdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ajwardī (Qumm, 1377) II, 203, *bāb* 46, §5; found in *Bihār*, LXIV, 271–72. On Ḥanzala, see al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Mūsawī a-Zanjānī, *Wasīlat al-Dārayn ft Anṣār al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut, 1395), pp. 134–36; Māmaqānī, *Tanqīh*, I, 382, §3446; as well as Ayoub, *Suffering*, pp. 116, 135–36. The text of this report on al-Riḍā is given in Appendix I, A.

⁸⁶ See above, nn. 45, 63.

magnified, particularly concerning the magnitude of the cosmic and heavenly reactions to Ḥusayn's death, and the gravity of the judgement on the community which even the beasts and birds of the air comprehended. One widespread theme in this connection is that of the troop of four thousand angels who had originally intended to come to his aid at Karbalā', but arrived too late; they look forward to Ḥusayn's return when they shall finally render their assistance in battle, or to the appearance of the Qā'im by whom revenge for Ḥusayn will be accomplished.⁸⁷ One such report has al-Ṣādiq state that when Ḥusayn was killed, the angels raised a din around God, crying.⁸⁸

'O Lord, is Ḥusayn, your bosom friend and the son of your Prophet, to be thus treated?' . . . So God raised the 'shadow' (*ẓill*, the phantom-body) of the Qā'im, and He said: 'By this one shall I take vengeance for him from his oppressors.'

This report concludes with a description of the four thousand angels who preside at Ḥusayn's grave, raising a commotion of lamentations until the Resurrection Day.

All these themes relating to the death of Ḥusayn: his and his family's pre-ordained rôle to submit to suffering as a mark of election, his unflinching upholding of truth in the face of injustice and misfortune, his 'presence' alive and aware in heaven from where he intercedes for his *shī'a* and punishes his enemies, and his function as the pretext and precursor of the Qā'im, who shall arise to execute vengeance on Ḥusayn's behalf; all are brought together in a striking *ḥadīth* found in Ibn Qawlawayhi's *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See e.g., *Kāmil*, p. 74 (al-Ḥusayn's *rūḥ* provokes 70,000 angels in each of the heavens, who impatiently await the End Time for vengeance); al-Shaykh al-Ṣādūq, *Ḥal al-Sharā'i* I, 154; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1374), I, 534 (the angels are shown the Imams, all of whom are *qā'ims*, and who shall execute vengeance); and al-Kulaynī, loc. cit., I, 283; *Kāmil*, pp. 115, 192.

⁸⁸ Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, quoted in *Bihār*, XLV, 221. In later popular tradition, al-Ḥusayn is idealized as the tender young sprout (*farkh*) from the progeny of Fāṭima and Muḥammad, who was destined to be killed and whose death forms the climax of human transgression, since the slaying of Abel by Cain; see *Bihār*, XLV, 314-16, for these legends.

⁸⁹ *Kāmil*, 332-35, *bāb al-nawādir*, §11. The *isnād* reaches back to al-Ṣādiq through Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī and 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī. This report is summarized in Appendix II.

which is given below in Appendix II. The scene is Muḥammad's nocturnal journey to heaven, where God informs the Prophet that he shall be tested for steadfastness through three afflictions: (i) hunger; (ii) denial and fear in combatting the unbelievers, and pain and injury in battle; and (iii) the repudiation, injustice, and murder which the family of Muḥammad shall meet with. The Prophet is apprised of all the pain and misfortunes predestined to occur to the members of his immediate family, and in turn, he consents, signalling his compliance with God's decree. Finally, Muḥammad is shown the likeness (*shabah*) of the Qā'im, who will bring about the promised victory which the Prophet's forbearance can no longer refrain from demanding. The scene closes with the Family of the Prophet passing sentence on their enemies, and excruciating punishment being inflicted mercilessly, since the intercession of the Intercessors is of no avail for them.⁹⁰ Here can be glimpsed the depth of the love and the hate which has been a driving force for Shi'a ideology.

It is a commonplace in occidental studies of Ḥusayn's martyrdom, and of the Muḥarram ceremonies of *Ta'ziye* in general, to draw a comparison with the passion of Jesus. The crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus may be a natural parallel for a Christian to approach the issue of voluntary suffering and the mystery of life after death. Yet the parallel with the passion of Jesus was explicitly drawn by some of the Shi'a from the late 1st century onwards. The early Muslims found it natural to draw an analogy between the death of a prophetic figure and the death and ascension of earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus. While the

⁹⁰ The visions or account of al-Ḥusayn in heaven with the other members of the Prophet's Family, interceding for his 'visitors', and of the vales in Hell wherein his killers suffer, must be viewed within an apocalyptic context, and evoke time-honoured themes and images from well before Islam. John J. Collins observes that: '... apocalyptic language is commissive in character: it commits us to a view of the world for the sake of actions and attitudes that are entailed. . . . Most of all it entails an appreciation of the great resource that lies in the human imagination to construct a symbolic world where the integrity of values can be maintained in the face of social and political powerlessness and even of the threat of death' (*The Apocalyptic Imagination* [New York, 1984], p. 215). See P. Chelkowski, 'Popular Shi'i mourning rituals', pp. 207-26 of this volume, for depictions of apocalyptic scenes from popular religious art.

radical Shī'a appear to have made much of the precedent of Jesus in relation to Ḥusayn's death, it is interesting to note that the predominant trend among the Ḥusaynid 'Alids was to relate Ḥusayn with John the Baptist, as well as other prophets noteworthy for their exemplifying deliberate acceptance of suffering or outward humiliation as a mark of grace and inner exaltation, such as the prophet Job. Al-Bāqir upheld Job as a model of the impeccable prophet who, though sinless, suffered degradation and trials in order to gain divine reward and privilege.⁹¹ One reason for Job's affliction, according to al-Bāqir, was: 'Lest they impute *rubūbiyya* (=lordship) to him, if they perceived what God willed should be bestowed on him from the prodigious things of His blessings . . .'.⁹² Clearly, the danger which al-Ṣādiq perceived in the Jesus/Ḥusayn parallel, and which lay behind his emphatic condemnation of the *mufawwida*, reveals the deeper issue at stake and its importance for his teaching on the Imamate. For the *ghulāt* were accused of *tafiwīd*, that is, the heretical notion of prophetism which held that God had delegated authority in religious matters to Muḥammad, who in turn had delegated 'Alī, and after him the Imams, and that this prophetic status had then been allegedly bestowed on various enthusiasts from the Imams; this was often accompanied by the claim that the Imams were divine (the notion of Two Gods: a God in heaven, and a God on earth). Al-Ṣādiq also drew an analogy between the prophet Ismā'il the son of Abraham, and Ḥusayn, as an argument for the transfer of the Imamate from al-Ḥasan to the progeny of Ḥusayn.⁹³ This analogy must have served to counter both Zaydī and Ḥasanid claims to the Imamate in preference to the Ḥusaynid line.

For al-Ṣādiq and his father, the Imam must suffer in order to affirm his humanity and the humanity of the prophets as well as to

⁹¹ Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. Muḥammad Mahdī al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Khurāsānī (Najaf, 1971), II, 399–400; *Bihār*, XLIV, 275–76; on account of his suffering despite being sinless, Job exhibited a state of bodily incorruptibility after death.

⁹² See al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām* (Cairo, 1370), pp. 42ff (al-Ṣādiq's interpretation of 16: 121), quoted in R. Dugorn, *La Geste D'Ismu'el* (Paris and Geneva, 1981), p. 241; and *Kitāb al-Haft al-Sharīf* (Beirut, 1964), pp. 92–93, quoted in Ayoub, *Suffering*, p. 247.

⁹³ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 42.

fulfill what God has previously ordained concerning them. In fact, the prophets and their legatees experience the greatest burden of sufferings over all other men. But their suffering is intentional, not passive, and takes place despite their impeccability; it is a confirmation of the purity of the Imam, the burden of his position, and comprises a grace bestowed by God. For al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq, Ḥusayn suffered martyrdom at the hands of evil men, and is not 'in hiding' (thus unapproachable) or incommunicado. Rather, while Ḥusayn was killed, he is alive in heaven, where alongside the other members of his family, he hears and responds to the prayers of his *shū'a*, and mediates remission of sin. He sees and hears the visitors to his camp at Karbalā'. Through his violent death, Ḥusayn exemplifies suffering consciously accepted; by his being alive in heaven, Ḥusayn embodies a spiritual presence and the possibility for divine forgiveness, and at the same time the certainty of vengeance.

The Ḥusaynid 'Alids saw the death of Ḥusayn, and his life-in-death, to be directly connected with the ultimate reversal of the fortunes of the Imams, through his eventual return and triumphant victory heralding the appearance of the Qā'im. Justice demands that Ḥusayn himself, as well as 'Alī, or even Muḥammad, would finally punish their oppressors. But al-Ṣādiq may have discouraged the notion that such punishment entailed a bodily transformation in this life (*maskh*), for this latter view tended to diminish the stress on a this-worldly bodily resurrection as occasion for punishment (*raj'a*) by placing the brunt of God's revenge on bodily transformation into animal forms.

The heavy emphasis on the eschatological retribution by Ḥusayn in the *karra* stems perhaps from the need felt by the Ḥusaynid Imams to consolidate and promote solidarity among their followers in the face of government-sponsored persecution and defeat, arising from what has been termed in another context 'cognitive dissonance'. This may well be a factor in all strongly eschatological expectations, and could be seen as part of the tension between the teaching of the Ḥusaynid 'Alids, with their pronounced aloofness towards overtly chiliastic expressions, and the pre-occupations of the wider Shī'ī movement with which they had to define their relation. In this process, the Ḥusaynids from al-Sajjād onwards

attempted to temper the cruder ideological components of influential Shī'ī currents and inject a distinctly spiritual valuation into religious discourse. In the case of the Imam's humanity and suffering, and the rôles of intercession and eschatological vengeance, the figure of Ḥusayn served a fundamental rôle.

Finally a word of caution is necessary. The doctrine of the Imamate involves much more than what has been touched on in this study. To understand the intent of the Ḥusaynids, and better appreciate how their teaching contrasts in distinctive ways with those of parallel Shī'ī groupings, much more would need to be examined. For example, the intercession and grace granted the *shī'a* as opposed to the unrelenting torments envisioned for their enemies reflects only one aspect of their teaching about Love and Hate for God's sake, and needs to be related to a dualistic vision of history and of man (e.g., two races of men at eternal enmity, two opposed principles within the individual, etc.). Again, the motives behind their concern to combat the exaggerated notions about the Imam were not solely their keen sense of personal risk at being worshipped as demi-gods, but their commitment to safeguarding the proper rôle which they desired to fulfill. Al-Bāqir is reported to have bitterly complained to his own companions about those Shī'a who, in allying themselves to his cause, actually harmed what he believed to be his true purpose:⁹⁴

I am astonished by people who undertake our friendship (*yatawallūnūnā*) and take us as Imams, and who portray obedience to us as obligatory upon themselves like obedience to God; who then break their testimony and defeat themselves through the feebleness of their hearts. Thus they diminish our rights and by so doing, the ones whom God has granted the proof of the truth of knowing us and assenting to our cause are thereby led to find fault with us on account of [what those others say concerning us] (*ya'ibūna bi-dhālika 'alaynā man 'a'fāhu Allāhu burhāna ḥaqqi ma'rifatinā . . .*).

Do you think that God, Blessed and Exalted, enjoined obedience to His Friends upon His servants, and would then conceal from [the Imams] news of the heavens and earth; and so deprive them of the substance of knowledge (*mawadd al-'ilm*) concerning what is referred to them [for their authoritative religious ruling], and which contains the sustaining basis of [His servants'] religion?

⁹⁴ Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, quoted in *Bihār*, XLIV, 276-77.

APPENDIX I

REPORTS CONDEMNING THE VIEW THAT AL-ḤUSAYN WAS NOT KILLED

(a) Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. Maḥdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ajwārdī (Qumm 1377/1957), II, 203, *bāb* 46, §5. Quoted in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, IV, 271–272.

From Tamīm al-Qurashī, from his father, from Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Anṣārī, that al-Harawī said: I said to al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

In the Sawād of al-Kūfa there is a group who teach that the Prophet did not experience distractedness (*sahw*) in his prayer.

R: They have lied, may God damn them! Indeed the one who is not inattentive is God [alone], save Whom there is no God.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, among them is a group who maintain that al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī was not killed, and that his resemblance (*shibh* or *shabah*) was imposed on Ḥanzala b. Asʿad al-Shāmī, and that he was raised to heaven, as Jesus, son of Mary was raised. They advance as an argument this verse: *And God will not grant the disbelievers a way to prevail against the believers.* (4: 141)

R: They have lied; upon them is God's wrath and His curse; and they have disbelieved due to their denial of the Prophet of God in his report that al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī will be murdered. By God, al-Ḥusayn was killed, and those who were better than al-Ḥusayn were also killed: the Prince of Believers [Alī] and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī. There was no one of Us who was not martyred. I [myself], by God, am to be killed by poison, by the slaying of one who shall assassinate me. I know that through a pact entrusted to me from the Messenger of God, and Gabriel informed him of it on behalf of the Lord of the Worlds.

As for the word of God, Mighty and Majestic: *And God will not grant the disbelievers a way to prevail against the believers*, He is saying that God will not grant the *kāfir* a proof (*hujja*) against the *mu'min*; and God has related concerning unbelievers who slew the prophets unjustly [c.f. 4: 155], and God did not grant [the unbelievers] a way to prevail with a proof against His prophets by their killing of them.'

(b) Al-Ṭabarsī, *Al-Ihtijāj*, II, 281–83; quoted in al-Majlisī *Biḥār al-Anwār*, IV, 271.

From al-Kulaynī, that Ishāq b. Ya'qūb said:

I asked Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī⁹⁵, may God have mercy on him, to expedite the sending of a letter on my behalf in which I had asked [the Imam] about questions that caused problems for me. Then there came the signed undertaking in the handwriting of our Lord, the Master of the End-Time, peace be upon him.⁹⁶ '... As for the doctrine of he who claims that al-Ḥusayn did not die [or: was not killed], this is unbelief, and a denial [of received reports], and a straying from the truth.'

(c) Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ḥal al-Sharā'ī'*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1383/1963), I, 241–43, *bāb* 177: 'The reason that God did not make the Prophets and Imams victorious in all their circumstances.' Quoted in al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, II, 285–88.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Tāliqānī said:

I was with the Shaykh Abū Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rūh,⁹⁷ may God sanctify his spirit, with a group that included 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Qaṣrī. A man went up and said to him:

I wish to ask you about something.

T: Ask whatever seems proper to you.

Man: Tell me about al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, peace be upon him,—is he the friend of God?

T: Yes.

Man: And tell me about his murderer, may God curse him, is he the enemy of God?

T: Yes.

Man: Then is it possible that God should give mastery to His enemy over His friend?

⁹⁵ The second of the four agents or representatives of the twelfth or Hidden Imam, who died in Baghdad in 304/917.

⁹⁶ There follows a whole list of pronouncements from the twelfth Imam on diverse questions over which the Shī'a argued.

⁹⁷ Al-Ḥusayn b. Rūh al-Nawbakhtī, the third agent of the Hidden Imam, d. 326/937–38.

7: Understand what I am going to say to you! Know that God, the Exalted, does not address people by means of an eye-witnessing, nor does He instill awe in them by speaking. Rather He, Mighty and Majestic, sent to them Messengers of their own species and kind, men like themselves. If He had sent to them Messenger Prophets not of their kind and their form, they would have shunned them and would not have obeyed them. So when they came to them and were of their species, eating food and walking in the markets, they said to them: 'You are like us, so we will not obey you until you perform something which we are incapable of performing the like of; then we shall know that you are chosen to the exclusion of us in what we are not capable of.'

Thus God, the Exalted, appointed for them the miracles which creatures are incapable of performing, and among them was he who brought the flood after the admonition and excuses, so all who tyrannized and were overbearing, drowned. And among them was he who was cast into the fire, and it was for him cool and safe. And he who extracted from barren ground a female camel and made milk flow in her udder. And he for whom the sea split, and springs gushed from the rock, and the dry staff was turned into a snake that gobbled up their [falsehoods]. Among them was he who healed the blind and the leper and gave life to the dead by God's consent, and who informed them of what they were eating and stored away in their homes. And among them was he for whom the moon was split and to whom the animals such as the camel and the wolf spoke; and others. So when they performed such works and the people of their communities were incapable of performing similar things, it was part of the pre-ordainment of God, the Exalted, and His kindness towards His worshippers and His wisdom, to make His Prophets with these miracles victorious, in one situation, and in another, vanquished, and in one circumstance conquerors, and in another conquered. If He, Mighty and Majestic, had appointed them victorious and conquerors in all of their circumstances, and did not try them and test them, the people would have taken them to be divinities beside God the Exalted, and [the people] would not have recognized the excellence of their forbearance and self-possession in the face of misfortune and tribulations and ordeals.

But He, Mighty and Majestic, appointed their circumstances with respect to that like the circumstances of others, in order that they might be forbearing in the condition of ordeal and affliction, and grateful in the condition of well-being and ascendancy over enemies, and to be humble not haughty in all their circumstances, not waxing strong. [God placed them in these circumstances] in order that humanity might know that [the prophets] have a God, and that He is their Creator

and Director, so that [people] will worship Him and follow His Messengers.

And God's convincing argument is proven against whomever goes beyond the limit concerning them, who presumptuously claims Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) for them, or who obstinately resists and diverges, disobeys and repudiates what the Prophets and the Messengers offer. Let him perish who was destroyed by a clear proof, and let him live who was made alive by a clear proof. ... [Ibn Rūh adds that his words were not his own, but came direct from the hidden Imam.]

APPENDIX II

AN APOCALYPSE CONCERNING THE HEAVENLY STATUS OF AL-HUSAYN AND THE FUTURE DELIVERER, THE QĀ'IM

Ibn Qawlawayhi, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Amīnī al-Tabrīzī (Najaf, 1356), pp. 332-35, *bāb al-nawādir*, §11.

From Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far al-Himyarī, from his father, from 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Sālīm, from Muḥammad b. Khālid [al-Barqī], from 'Abdallāh b. Hammād al-Baṣrī, from 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Aṣammī [al-Masma'ī], from Hammād b. 'Uthmān, that Abū 'Abdallāh [Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq] said:

When the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, made his nocturnal journey to heaven, it was said to him that God, Blessed and Exalted, was testing him through three things in order to see the state of his steadfastness. The Prophet said: 'I surrender to your decree O Lord; I have no power for self-possession except through You! What are they?'⁹⁸ ... As for the third, [it consists of] what your household and those after you shall meet with of killing. For your brother 'Alī, he shall meet with cursing and rebuke from your community, and reproaches, dispossession, repudiation, injustice, and finally murder.' [Muḥammad accepted.] 'For your daughter [Fāṭima], she will suffer oppression and be dispossessed, her

⁹⁸ The first mentioned is hunger and preferring needy ones over himself and his family. Muḥammad accepts. The second is denial and great fear in combatting unbelievers, and steadfastness during pain and injury. Again the Prophet accepts: 'I accept this, O Lord, and am content and surrender myself; for success and steadfastness are from You.'

rights will be taken from her in anger at the one who gave them to her [i.e., out of hatred for the Prophet], and she will be beaten while she is pregnant. She and her home and womenfolk will be forcibly entered without leave, then disgrace and humiliation will hit her; she will not find a preserver, and will have a miscarriage resulting from the beating, and she will die from that.⁹⁹ [Muḥammad accepted.] 'She shall have two sons from your brother [Alī], one of them [i.e., al-Ḥasan] will be slain treacherously, plundered and vilified; your community shall do that to him.' [Muḥammad accepted.] 'As for her other son [i.e., al-Ḥusayn], your community shall appeal to him for *jihād*, then they will slay him in captivity, and slay his sons and those with him of his household. They shall plunder his womenfolk; then they will beseech My help. The decree has elapsed from Me concerning him for martyrdom, for him and for those with him. His slaying is to be a proof against whoever is between its two regions, the people of the heavens and the earths shall lament him, pitying him, as well as the angels who did not come to his assistance.

'Then shall a male child be extracted from [al-Ḥusayn's] loins; by him shall I make you victorious. Verily his *shabah* (=figure, person; or *shabah* = likeness, image) is with me underneath the Throne.'

[The *rāwī* notes a variant reading: 'Then shall I bring forth from his loins a male child who will come to his aid and by whom he shall be aided to victory; his *shabah* is with me beneath the Throne.']

'He [i.e., the Mahdī] shall fill the earth with justice and cover it with equity. Alarm shall proceed before him; he shall slay until he is filled with misgivings about it.'

Muḥammad: I said: 'Truly we are from God ...' Then I was told: 'Thrust your head forward!' Then I looked at a man of the fairest form, the most pleasant scent, light radiating from before, above, and below him. So I called to him and he came up to me. Robes of light were upon him and the mark of every good, until he stood before me. I looked at the angels who had surrounded him; no one could have counted them save God, the Mighty, the Sublime. I said: 'O Lord, for whom is this one angry, and for whose sake have You multiplied those [angels]? You promised me victory by means of them, so I am expecting it from You. These are my family and my house, and You have informed me about what they shall meet with after I am gone. If You so desired, you would grant me victory by them [i.e., the Mahdī and the angelic army] against the one who wrongs [my family]. I have submitted and accepted and was content; and success and

⁹⁹ A reference to the claim of the Shī'a that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb physically mistreated Fāṭima after the event of *al-Saqīfa*, resulting in her miscarriage of an infant male, named in tradition Muḥsin; see above, n. 51.

contentment and aid over steadfastness come from You!

It was said to me: 'As for your brother, his reward with Me is the paradise of retreat as a resting place; due to his steadfastness, his proof (*hujja*) shall triumph over creatures on the Resurrection Day. I will entrust him with your Pool, from which he will give your friends to drink, and forbid it from your enemies. I make Hellfire cold and safe for him; he enters it and draws out whoever has the weight of a dust speck of love (*muwadda*) [for the Prophet's Family] in his heart, and I placed your resting place in one level of Paradise.

'As for your son the forsaken, the martyred, and your son the betrayed, the slain captive, truly they both are among those by whom I adorn My Throne. They have a mark of honour the like of which has never been imagined by men, by virtue of what befell them of misfortune. So it is incumbent upon Me [to give you the promised victory], so have trust.

'There is a token of esteem for every creature who arrives at his [al-Husayn's] grave, because his guests are your [Muhammad's] guests, and your guests are My guests, and it is incumbent upon Me to honour My guests. I shall grant him what he asks and repay him with a reward such that whoever considers the magnitude of My gift and what I multiplied for him of My honours shall envy him.

'As for your daughter, I shall have her halt at My Throne; then she will be told that God had pronounced a verdict in your favour against His creatures. Thus, whoever does you an injustice and wrongs your son, I will give an account concerning him according to your wish. In this way I shall make possible your ruling (*hukūma*) over them. . . . [p. 334]

[The narrative continues, depicting the sentence passed on the sinner, who is asked: '*Li-mā ittakhadha fulānan khalīlan* (-'Why did you take so-and-so as a friend [instead of 'Alī]?) The first one to pass judgement on the sinners is Muhsin b. 'Alī, who judges his killer ('Umar?); next Qunfudh and his master are judged and then whipped with lashes of fire. 'Alī then kneels before God to argue his case against the fourth sinner (Mu'āwiya?); and the first three are made to enter a pit which is then covered. Meanwhile, those who were obeying their authority (*kānū ft walāyatihim*) ask God to show them the ones who misled them so they can crush them underfoot; but God informs them that it is of no use for they will have to suffer their punishment as well. They moan lamenting their fate, surrounding the Pool, and pleading with 'Alī to pardon them and relieve their thirst; with them is Hafza.]

' . . . And it is said to them: "This is [Alī] whom you used to call the Prince of the Believers; go back thirsty and parched to Hellfire!, for your drink shall only be hot water and slops. And the intercession of the Intercessors is of no avail to you."

THE CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

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ISLAM as an all inclusive systematic religion is an interrelated set of ideals and realities covering the entire area of human notion and action, beliefs and practices, thought, word, and deed. Islamic principles and concepts cannot be fully and properly appreciated unless they are analysed and realized within the framework of Islam as a whole.¹

The concept of martyrdom (*shahāda*) in Islam can only be understood in the light of the Islamic concept of Holy Struggle (*jihād*) and the concept of *jihād* may only be appreciated if the concept of the doctrine of enjoining right and discovering wrong (*al-amr bi 'l-ma'rūf*) is properly appreciated, and good and bad,² right and wrong, can only be understood if the independent divine source of righteousness, truth, and goodness (*tawhīd*), and how the Message of the divine source of righteousness and truth has been honestly and properly conveyed to humanity through prophethood, are understood. Finally the divine message may not be fully appreciated unless the embodiment of this divine message, or the Model of Guidance, and the Supreme Paradigm (*imāma* or *uswa*) is properly recognized.

We can thus see how the concept of martyrdom in Islam is linked with the entire religion of Islam. This whole process can be

¹ A. Ezzati, *The Spread of Islam* (1976), p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, Introduction.

somehow understood if the term 'Islam' is appreciated. This is because being a derivate of the Arabic root *salāma*, which means 'surrender' and 'peace', Islam is a wholesome and peaceful submission to the will of Allah.³ This means being prepared to die (martyrdom) in the course of this submission. Thus the concept of martyrdom, like all other Islamic concepts, can be fully and wholly appreciated only in the light of the Islamic doctrine of *tawhīd*, or the absolute unity of Allah and full submission to His will and command. It cannot be fully appreciated in isolation.

In this sense, the concept of *shahāda* is no exception. All Islamic concepts are interrelated, and should be appreciated within the framework of the doctrine of *tawhīd*.⁴

The concept of *shahāda* in Islam has been misunderstood by both Muslims and non-Muslims. As stated above, *shahāda* is closely associated with the concept of *jihād*. Most non-Muslim scholars, intentionally or unintentionally, have defined *jihād* as only the Holy War, and thus have understood neither *jihād* nor *shahāda*.⁵ The Muslims, mostly taking into consideration the martyrs of the early days of Islamic history, define martyrdom in terms of the fatalistic death of those dear to Allah, and do not see the close link between continuous struggle in the cause of Allah (*jihād*) and martyrdom.⁶

Martyrdom is not the monopoly of Islam (though it is the monopoly of spiritual, religious, and divine systems, and cannot be claimed by followers of materialistic schools). Islam introduces its own concept of martyrdom. An Islamic concept should be explained within the framework of Islam, and not, by Muslims or by non-Muslims, in the light of non-Islamic concepts such as guilt and suffering. Muslims are not allowed to explain Islamic principles without taking due consideration of the entire conceptual system of Islam. *Shahāda* thus cannot be explained purely in terms of intercession and mediation. That is to say, those early martyrs of Islam volunteered for death to be able to intercede and mediate for sinners on the Day of Judgement.

The Islamic concept of intercession and mediation (*shafā'a*)

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42.

⁴ Morrish, *BIC*, p. 191.

⁵ For this see N. Sālihi, *Shahād-i Javīd*.

⁶ Tabātabā'i, *Al-Mizān*.

should be appreciated within the framework of the principle of causality, and not solely as spiritual mediation.⁷ Islam rejects the Christian concept of mediation without the personal responsibility for the salvation of oneself.

The concepts of martyrdom and Holy Struggle in the cause of Allah are interrelated. Both words have been frequently used in the Holy Qur'an.⁸ In fact, there is no martyrdom without struggle in the cause of Allah and for the cause of the truth. Both words have literal meanings different from their terminological meanings, although these terminological meanings were originally based on the literal meanings.⁹ They developed their terminological meanings later on, though the term *shahāda* was used in the Qur'an for those who were martyred too.¹⁰ The Islamic concepts of both *shahāda* and *jihād* have been misunderstood, particularly by non-Muslims, mainly by Orientalists.

The word *shahāda* is derived from the Arabic verbal root *shahada*, which means to 'see', to 'witness', to 'testify', to 'become a model and paradigm'. *Shahāda* therefore literally means to 'see', to 'witness', and to 'become a model'. A *shahīd* is the person who sees and witnesses,¹¹ and he is therefore the witness, as if the martyr witnesses and sees the truth physically and thus stands by it firmly, so much so that not only does he testify it verbally, but he is prepared to struggle and fight and give up his life for the truth, and thus to become a martyr. In this way, and by his struggle and sacrifice for the sake of the truth, he becomes a model, a paradigm, and an example for others, worthy of being copied, and worthy of being followed.¹²

In this process, the keyword is 'truth' (*haqq*), its recognition and declaration, the struggle and fight for it, and the preparedness to die for its sake and thus set the model for the seekers of truth. The goal, motive, and the whole aim is the establishment of the truth. *Jihād* is the means for establishing the truth, and may lead to

⁷ E.g., 2: 218; 8: 76; 9: 115, 143; 13: 43.

⁸ 29: 52.

⁹ 4: 72.

¹⁰ *Farhang Jāmi'i, Mufradāt Raghīb*. See 2: 105, 143, 185, 282; 5: 106.

¹¹ 2: 142.

¹² 2: 185.

martyrdom, but does not necessarily lead to being killed for it in the battlefield, although it necessarily involves the continuous Holy Struggle, and death in the cause of the struggle.

We may therefore conclude that there is neither *jihād* nor martyrdom outside the realm of truth, that martyrdom applies only when it is preceded by *jihād*, that *jihād* is an inclusive struggle for the cause of the truth, that a *mujāhid* dies the death of a martyr even though he does not fall on the battlefield. He dies as a martyr even though he is not killed, on the condition that he stays loyal to the divine truth and stands ready to fight for the truth and to defend it at all costs, even at the cost of his own life. He is a *mujāhid* while he lives, and a martyr if he dies or is killed for it.

We have explained that a martyr establishes himself as a paradigm and a model. Both *shahīd* (=martyr) and *shāhid* (=model) are derived from the same Arabic root. In this sense, the concept of *shahāda* is closely related to the concept of prophethood in Islam. Both the martyrs and the prophets are regarded as paradigms (2: 143).

In Islam man needs guidance to the truth. The true guidance is from the whole truth, God, the Source of Truth and Guidance (50: 6, 71, 88; 92: 12). But since it is man who is to be guided, the guide should naturally be a man. Islam is the message from the source of truth, given to the Messenger as the guideline for leading mankind to the truth. Guiding humanity requires leading humanity. The true faith is united with righteous living in Islam, and there is unity of belief and practice in Islam. A comprehensive guidance therefore involves leading in thought, words, and behaviour. The guide should therefore practise what he preaches,¹³ and should himself be the supreme incarnation and the perfect embodiment of the message he spreads. He should be a paradigm, a model, and a model-maker.¹⁴ Muḥammad was thus the Messenger who brought the comprehensive universal Message of Allah, and he was the incarnation of the divine message,¹⁵ and the living example of his mission, the model (*shahīd*), the paradigm (*uswa*). The key word in the concept of prophethood in Islam is thus human guidance. This

¹³ 2: 142.

¹⁴ 2: 285.

¹⁵ 6: 48; 14: 10-12; 16: 43-4.

involves the recognition of what humanity should be guided to, what guidance is, how it should be done, and the realization of the guidance by being the true model of the actual guidance. This is why Muḥammad was himself the first Muslim and the best model of Islam. And thus his practice is recognized as as the guideline and standard pattern (*sunna*) for the Muslim community, the members of which are supposed to become models (*shuhadā'*) for the entire human community.¹⁶ The prophets, including Muḥammad, were thus models and model-makers, and their disciples and companions were models. Thus those who carry on the struggle in the cause of the truth are *mujāhids* and *shahīds* at the same time.

The position of the prophets as the paradigms and model-makers in Islam gives the Islamic concept of prophethood a unique characteristic. Their main responsibility is thus leading and guiding humanity to the truth by being the true incarnation of God.¹⁷ They do not intercede and mediate between the source of the truth and humanity spiritually, in the sense that they come to be crucified to pay for the sins committed by humanity through Adam. In Islam, everybody is responsible for his or her own actions.¹⁸ Nothing and nobody can intercede between the sinner and God. The concept of intercession in Islam should be appreciated within the framework of the principle of causality. That is to say that the prophets, by guiding and leading the people to the truth, cause their salvation (*sa'āda*). Salvation must be earned and deserved, and the prophets and the Messengers of Allah provide us with the opportunity to earn and deserve salvation,¹⁹ that is to say, it is not the crucifixion and the cross that causes salvation, but it is the realization of the truth that causes it. Man is thus originally sinless, good, and peaceful, and the rôle of the prophets is a positive one—that of guidance and of being a paradigm—and not a negative one. Martyrs are the super-models of the divine message, too, and in this way they share a special responsibility and honour with the prophets.

Because the responsibility of the prophets is partly to provide the

¹⁶ 6: 48; 14: 10-12; 16: 43-4.

¹⁷ 6: 164.

¹⁸ See *Tabāṭabā'ī, Al-Mizān*.

¹⁹ 2: 142.

living example of the divine message, their message should be practical so that the rest of humanity, like them, is able to copy and follow them and practise the Message too. What Jesus did, according to Christian doctrine, was a unique action by a unique being (the crucifixion of the Son of God), not possible and necessary for humanity to copy. But what Muḥammad did was to convey the practical guidelines of righteousness, and he himself lived within those guidelines to prove their practicability for the rest of humanity. This is why the prophets are called *shahīds* (paradigms and witnesses) in the Qur'ān,²⁰ a term used for martyrs later on in the early days of Islamic history.²¹ Muḥammad, therefore, like other Messengers, is the incarnation of Islam, full surrender to God, the universal religion of all of creation, including man.²² He was the model of what he taught, and a paradigm for humanity. A model attracts and leads people to the truth. He does not force them. This is in full harmony with the concept of man in Islam. Islam rejects the incarnation in man of the essence of the actual divinity, but fully encourages the incarnation of God's guidance, will, and command, to become the living example of God's full code of thought and life (*dīn*, religion) for man. The prophets are the living examples of the divine message, and by being so make others the examples. Martyrs are also full examples of the divine message, and thus the embodiment of the divine will. There are a few Islamic traditions which introduce the blood of the martyrs as the blood of God (*thār Allāh*).

Shī'ism being one of the fundamental and original sects of Islam, and staying loyal to all authentic Islamic doctrines, lays great emphasis on the doctrine of the leadership (Imamate) of the Muslim leadership. I believe it is not inappropriate to suggest that all of Shī'ism revolves around one major principle, that of the leadership of the Islamic community (*umma*).

The keyword in Shī'ism is thus Imamate, which means leading and guiding those in need of guidance. If the community is to be led and guided, the leaders themselves should be the leading examples

²⁰ 2: 143.

²¹ 4: 69.

²² Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*.

of the faith in what they try to lead the community to believe in, and models of the code of thought and practice they try to lead others to practice. The concept of leadership involves three elements: (i) those who lead (*imām*), (ii) those who are to be led (*shī'a*, *māmūn*), and (iii) the actual leadership, guidance, and code of leadership. The community cannot be lead unless those who lead believe in what they practice and in what they preach others to practice. In short, *imāms* should themselves be the living examples and models for those they try to lead.

If prophethood and messengership involve two major responsibilities, namely, introducing and spreading the divine message, and setting the model and being the living example of the divine message, the Imamate involves only the latter responsibility. This is why every Messenger is also an Imam, but an Imam is not necessarily a Messenger. In fact, the office of the Imamate is the responsibility for providing the model for the office of messengership, and this is how he leads. We can therefore understand that Shī'ism (following the leader) based on the doctrine of the Imamate (leadership) is more directly involved with the idea of setting the model, providing the example, and producing the paradigm. The entire history of Shī'ism, and the lives of the Shī'ī Imams should be appreciated in this context and within the concept of the Imamate, which is the leading of humanity to salvation by guiding them to the full implementation of Allah's code for the salvation of humanity, by being the supreme example in word and deed of that divine code. That is to say that they live a life of continuous struggle in the cause of Allah and of truth, and that is why they are all regarded as martyrs, whether they die on the battlefield or in bed.

The event of Karbalā', the martyrdom of the Imam Ḥusayn on 'Āshūrā', and the whole struggle he undertook, plays a very crucial rôle in the history of Shī'ism. Yet this unique historical event is seen by the Shī'a as a model event to inspire the Muslims. This is explained in the well known narration frequently quoted 'Every day is 'Āshūrā', and every place is Karbalā''. This is partly why it has kept its dynamic, resilient, and revolutionary spirit, and features throughout history, and this is how Shī'ism truly reflects this spirit.

HUSAYN THE MARTYR: A COMMENTARY ON THE ACCOUNTS OF THE MARTYRDOM IN ARABIC SOURCES

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THE importance of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn can be seen in the great attention paid to it by the early Muslim historians whose works have survived to the present day. Most of these historical works are of a general kind but the amount of space which they devote to this event indicates the momentous impact it had on Muslims. The early historians whose works are my main concern all lived in the third and fourth centuries of the Islamic era. They based their works, in the main, on earlier monographs devoted entirely to the subject which only survived in these later works. Fortunately the bibliographical works of Ibn Nadīm, al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī provide us with evidence of many of these earlier monographs. We can also deduce them from the writings of later historians. In attempting to describe this historical tradition, I have divided the account into ten phases. In these phases, I will point out what survives from earlier writers and analyse the different presentations.

It will be necessary, first, to give a list of the monographs or lengthy accounts on the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn which we have some record of or which we can surmise: al-Aṣḥab b. Nubāta¹ (d. second half of 1st cent. AH), Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī² (d. 128),

¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist* (Mashhad, 1348sh), p. 63.

² Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* (Teheran, n.d.), p. 100.

'Ammār b. Mu'āwiya³ (d. 133), 'Awāna b. al-Ḥakam⁴ (d. 147), Abū Mikhnāf⁵ (d. 157), Hishām b. al-Kalbī⁶ (d. 204), Al-Wāqidī⁷ (d. 207), Naṣr b. Muzāḥim⁸ (d. 212), Al-Madā'inī⁹ (d. 215)

These are all the early works which we know at present but there were certainly many more. We also know of monographs written later, but in the third and fourth centuries more general historical writing flourished and most historians preserved some account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn. The main works which will provide the material for the investigation of this historical tradition are those of Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 246), al-Balādhurī (d. 279), al-Dīnawarī (d. 282), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292), al-Ṭabarī (d. 311), Ibn A'thām (d. 314), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346), Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. 356), and al-Muḥīd (d. 413).

In an attempt to reconstruct the tradition of historical writing about the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn, it seems appropriate to divide the narrative into distinct sections. Naturally differences between different writers may concern only some of these sections and reports if only some of these occur in early writings. I have adopted the following divisions: (i) the situation prior to the death of Mu'āwiya after the death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn; (ii) Yazīd's succession and his attempt to get the Imam al-Ḥusayn to pay homage to him, followed by the latter's retreat to Mecca; (iii) the letters to the Imam al-Ḥusayn from Kūfa; (iv) the mission of Muslim b. 'Aqīl to Kūfa and the appointment and activities of Ibn Ziyād as governor of Kūfa; (v) the Imam al-Ḥusayn's journey to Karbalā'; (vi) negotiations with 'Umar b. Sa'd and the Kūfan army; (vii) the battle and the death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn; (viii) the desecration of his head and the treatment of his family.

Al-Aṣḥagh b. Nubāta is accredited with the first known account

³ This account was probably not a monograph but it represents a substantial, continuous piece. It is recorded in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-al-Muluk* (Leiden 1881-3), II, 227-32, 281-3.

⁴ That he had an account can be assumed from the extracts used by Ibn al-Kalbī in al-Ṭabarī's version.

⁵ On Abū Mikhnāf, see U. Sezgin, *Abū Mikhnāf* (Leiden, 1971).

⁶ Most of his account is preserved by al-Ṭabarī.

⁷ Ibn Naḍīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Bayard Dodge (New York, 1970), I, 215.

⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁹ Al-Muḥīd, *Kutub al-Irshād*, tr. I. K. A. Howard (London, 1981), p. 300.

of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn. He was a prominent member of the Shī'ī community who came from Kūfa. It is claimed that he was in charge of the *shurṭa* in Kūfa for the Imam 'Alī. He seems to have lived well into the second half of the 1st century AH and was contemporary with the events of the martyrdom.¹⁰

It seems that little or nothing of his work survives. However, Ibn al-Kalbī (in al-Ṭabarī's version of his account) and al-Madā'inī (as reported by Abū al-Faraj) give reports emanating from his son al-Qasīm. These may, in fact, belong to his father's book.

The account from Ibn al-Kalbī tells how when the Imam's camp was overrun, he attempted to reach the water and was stopped by a tribesman leading a group of his tribe. The Imam al-Ḥusayn calls on God to make him thirsty, and the tribesman's retort is to shoot an arrow into his throat. The Imam catches the blood with his hands after pulling the arrow out. The account then goes on to describe how that man suffered from an illness so that water would not quench his thirst, and eventually the amount he drank of it killed him.¹¹

The second report tells of the sufferings of the killer of al-'Abbās b. 'Alī. This killer dreamed of being flung into hell, so that every night he woke up screaming.¹²

The second account is attributed to Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī. He was a well known Shī'ī scholar and follower of the Imam al-Bāqir. He died in 128.¹³ His account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn seems to have been preserved by Naṣr b. Muzāḥim on the authority of Jābir's pupil, 'Amr b. Shamīr. Extracts from Naṣr's work are preserved by Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī. In fact Abū al-Faraj has cited very little of Jābir's account. What little there is are the names of some of the killers of the members of the *ahl al-bayt*, together with a verse which is included in Abū Mikhnāf's account.¹⁴ The verse tells that the blood shed by the tribesmen will be reckoned against them.

Ibn al-Kalbī also reports one narrative from Jābir. This is also on

¹⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63; Ibn Hajār, *Tadhīb al-Tadhīb*.

¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 361-2.

¹² Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn* (Najaf, 1965), pp. 78-9.

¹³ Al-Najāshī, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Abū al-Faraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 56, 57, 61, 62. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

the authority of Jābir's pupil, 'Amr b. Shamīr. In this report Jābir's authority is not given but it may well be the Imam al-Bāqir again. The report tells us how the Imam al-Ḥusayn was thirsty, and was struck in the mouth by an arrow shot by Ḥusayn b. Tamīm. The blood spurted from his mouth, and he brushed it away into the air. He then prayed: 'O God, count their number, destroy their power and do not leave one of them on earth.'¹⁵

From the little that has survived of Jābir's account, it is difficult to assess his work; but what remains does call into question the account of his contemporary, 'Ammār b. Mu'āwiya al-Duhnī.¹⁶ This narrative is reported by al-Ṭabarī, and 'Ammār claims to be reporting on the authority of the Imam al-Bāqir.

The report begins with a vivid introduction in which 'Ammār says that he asked the Imam al-Bāqir to tell him about the death of al-Ḥusayn so that it might be as if he was there himself. What follows is an account which agrees in its basic outline with the version of Ibn al-Kalbī, while being much shorter and briefer.

This version seemingly adds nothing to Ibn al-Kalbī's narrative. It differs only in giving a different house for the one which Muslim b. 'Aqīl stayed in when he came to Kūfa; it does omit some of the things which Ibn al-Kalbī has reported, but nothing of real substance. What, then, is the purpose of this narrative? It is clearly put forward as the authoritative Shī'ī account. 'Ammār was a well known traditionalist who, while being regarded as trustworthy by the general run of traditionalists, was also known for his Shī'ī inclinations, and as an adherent of the Imam al-Bāqir. He died in 133¹⁷ and is claimed to have a book of traditions on the authority of the Imam al-Bāqir. This account might well be regarded as the official account of the Imam al-Bāqir and therefore the one which should be accepted.

In fact, this seems to be what happened in the case of al-Mas'ūdī. In *Murūj al-Dhahab*, he reproduces the first half almost word for word with a few omissions.¹⁸ He gives a slightly different version of Ibn Ziyād's entry into Kūfa and adds some descriptions of the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

¹⁶ See n. 3.

¹⁷ Ibn Hajār, *Tadhīb al-Tadhīb*.

¹⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahāb* (Beirut, n.d.), III, pp. 53-5.

attempt to persuade al-Ḥusayn not to go to Kūfa. He then reverts to 'Ammār's account and faithfully reproduces it.¹⁹ It seems conceivable that al-Mas'ūdī got his account from al-Ṭabarī. Nowhere does al-Balādhurī use this account. Nor does Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī use it, although he was aware of it. He uses an *isnād* with a different intermediary from al-Ṭabarī.²⁰

Why, then, should this account be questioned? There are two main reasons. The first is that it reports that when the Imam al-Ḥusayn heard of the news of Muslim b. 'Aqīl's death, he wanted to return; and the second is that it reports that when 'Umar b. Sa'd's army came near, the Imam offered three options: (i) that he should return, (ii) that he should go to the outposts of the empire, and (iii) that he should go to Yazīd.

It is worth analysing Abū Mikhnāf's reports of these two incidents to see what they actually say and whether they are firm on these points. As far as Abū Mikhnāf is concerned, the Imam al-Ḥusayn learns of the death of Muslim before al-Ḥurr arrives. Those who bring the message of Muslim's death urge the Imam al-Ḥusayn to return but, before he can speak, the sons of 'Aqīl intervene and say that they will not return.²¹ There is no report of the Imam saying that he would return in this conversation. Thus 'Ammār's version, which uses the words 'he was about to go back', attempts to read the Imam's mind. It also omits the speech that he made in which he encouraged his supporters to leave him, not wanting to endanger their lives on a mission which was now clearly impossible.²² In a speech to al-Ḥurr's men from Kūfa, the Imam al-Ḥusayn does say that they had given him covenants and promises. If they had kept to them, he would go on to Kūfa, but if they had changed their minds, he would return.²³ However, this statement demanded that the Kūfans respond and admit that they had been false, and they did not do that.

As for the conversations between 'Umar b. Sa'd and the Imam al-Ḥusayn, Abū Mikhnāf gives three versions. The first clearly

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

²⁰ Abū al-Faraj, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 292-3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

states that no one knew what they talked about.²⁴ The second, preceded by the comment that it is what the majority of reporters hold, is the story of the three options.²⁵ However, it is followed by a report from 'Uqba b. Sim'ān, the Imam al-Ḥusayn's servant who was with him at Karbalā' and survived. He claimed that he was with the Imam al-Ḥusayn all the time and heard everything he said. He goes on: 'By God, he never gave the promise, which the people mention and allege, that he would put his hand in the hand of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, nor that they should send him to any one of the Muslim's border posts. Rather he said: "Leave me and I will go in this broad land so that we may see how the people's affair develops."²⁶ With regard to the third report, which Abū Mikhnāf said was the majority opinion of reporters, the evidence for the Imam al-Ḥusayn making such proposals is in a letter written by 'Umar b. Sa'd to Ibn Ziyād. According to this, Ibn Ziyād is about to agree with these terms but is dissuaded by Shamīr b. Dhī Jawshān.²⁷ As Shamīr is directly involved in the murder of the Imam al-Ḥusayn, this could be a report which tried to remove as much of the blame from the authorities and to transfer it to individuals. It could be an attempt to exonerate the authorities and as such could have been put out by supporters of the Umayyads. On the other hand, it might again be an attempt by 'Umar b. Sa'd to get a further delay in the operations.

When the reports of Abū Mikhnāf of these two incidents are compared with 'Ammār's version, we see that the latter provides interpretations of Abū Mikhnāf's reports. Because they are seemingly reported on the authority of the fifth Imam, al-Bāqir, they would seem to provide interpretations which Shī'ī supporters must accept. It seems that this was the purpose of 'Ammār's version; while still showing the death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn to be a tragedy it diminishes the stature of the Imam. It does not do so for Shī'īs but it does so for non-Shī'īs. It seems that its aim is to confirm to those who oppose the Imamate the weakness of individual Imams and to do so by putting this interpretation into

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

the mouth of the Imam. It certainly does so in the case of Wellhausen in his study of this event. He accepts 'Ammār's interpretation without even realizing that he has done so.²⁸

Doubt has been cast on the validity of 'Ammār's report from the fifth Imam. This is further confirmed if one examines its brief account of the actual fight. Thus it says: 'All the Imam al-Ḥusayn's followers were killed, among whom were more than the young men from his family. An arrow came and struck his son, who he had with him, on his lap. He began to wipe the blood from him saying, "O God, judge between us and a people who asked us to come so that they might help us and then killed us." He called for a striped cloak, tore it and then put it on. He took out his sword and fought until he was killed. A man of the tribe of Madhhij killed him and cut off his head.'²⁹

This is supposed to be a vivid account of the death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn, as told by the Imam al-Bāqir to a Shī'ī adherent, 'Ammār. It is clearly unacceptable. He does not know the exact number of the members of the Imam al-Ḥusayn's family who were killed. We have reports from Jābir b. Yazīd in which the Imam al-Bāqir names killers of individual members of the Imam al-Ḥusayn's family; yet, according to 'Ammār, he does not even identify the killer of the Imam. I have already mentioned an account from Jābir which describes vividly one attack on the Imam al-Ḥusayn. Ibn al-Kalbī also gives a similar report on the authority of the Imam al-Bāqir of the killing of the child with a slightly different prayer,³⁰ but this in no way confirms that 'Ammār's report is from the Imam. Rather it lends credence to it by including one report well known to non-Shī'īs from the Imam. Furthermore Abū Mikhnāf tells us that the sixth Imam reported that Imam al-Ḥusayn had received thirty-three spear thrusts and thirty-four sword blows on his body by the time he was killed.³¹ Yet 'Ammār gives us one brief sentence describing how the Imam died.

'Ammār's account must be suspect. It almost certainly did not

²⁸ J. Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, tr. Walzer and Ostle (Amsterdam, 1975).

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 282.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

come from the Imam al-Bāqir and seems unlikely to be the work of a Shī'ī such as 'Ammār who was contemporary with Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī and reported traditions from him.

Ibn al-Kalbī has included some narratives from 'Awāna b. al-Ḥakam which supplement the version of Abū Mikhnāf and sometimes provide alternatives for it. Al-Balādhurī also gives quotations from 'Awāna from different sources than Ibn al-Kalbī.³² 'Awāna presents his reports without any further *isnād*. This suggests that they are taken from a continuous account which 'Awāna had written.

The first extract which we have from it concerns Yazīd's appointment of Ibn Ziyād as governor of Kūfa after receiving complaints from his supporters that Nu'mān b. Bashir was not acting firm against Muslim b. 'Aqīl and the Shī'ī in Kūfa. 'Awāna seems to be the only source for the story of Yazīd consulting his father's Christian advisor, Sergius. Sergius tells Yazīd that his father was going to appoint Ibn Ziyād over Kūfa and advises him to do the same. Yazīd takes this advice and writes to Ibn Ziyād, telling him to go to Kūfa and hunt for Muslim. He gives him three choices in his treatment of Muslim: to imprison him, to kill him or to banish him.³³

Ibn A'thām repeats this account in a somewhat embellished version without giving any reference to 'Awāna³⁴ but it is clear that 'Awāna must be his source, probably in the version of Ibn al-Kalbī. Shaykh al-Mufīd also reproduces the account but he says that his version is based on Ibn A'thām;³⁵ al-Mufīd did not realize the implications of this version of 'Awāna; it removes the responsibility of the appointment of Ibn Ziyād from Yazīd and puts it, in effect, not on Mu'āwiya, but instead on Mu'āwiya's Christian advisor. Thus Yazīd is exonerated to some extent from Ibn Ziyād's conduct. Even the three choices given to Ibn Ziyād for dealing with Muslim are presented in such a way as to lay less emphasis on the killing of Muslim. The first is imprisonment, the last banishment. Ibn Ziyād's choice of the second, killing, put more of the responsibility for that on himself rather than Yazīd.

³² Al-Balādhurī, *Ansūb al-Ashraf* (Beirut, 1977), III, 165, 213, 218.

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 239-40.

³⁴ Ibn A'thām, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, V, 60-1.

³⁵ Al-Mufīd, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-8.

Another report from 'Awāna of some significance is paralleled by reports from Abū Mikhnāf. It emphasizes the reluctance of 'Umar b. Sa'd to go against the Imam al-Ḥusayn and stresses the pressure that Ibn Ziyād put on him by threatening to withdraw the appointment that he had earlier given him. 'Umar b. Sa'd suggests that the task be given to a tribal leader in Kūfa but Ibn Ziyād refuses. When 'Umar b. Sa'd's army reaches the Imam al-Ḥusayn, he finds it difficult to send a messenger to the Imam because nearly all of them had previously sent messages to the Imam urging him to come to Kūfa. The report ends with 'Umar b. Sa'd's hope that he will not have to fight the Imam al-Ḥusayn.³⁶

This account, like others, put the blame for 'Umar b. Sa'd's situation on Ibn Ziyād. It also stresses the treachery of the Kūfan tribal leaders. In this context, again, we see the blame for the ensuing situation being transferred from Yazīd to Ibn Ziyād and the Kūfan traitors.³⁷

A further report from 'Awāna concerns Yazīd's behaviour when the head of the martyred Imam and the prisoners of the *ahl al-bayt* are sent to him by Ibn Ziyād. In this account we are told that the members of the *ahl al-bayt* were imprisoned while Ibn Ziyād sent after Yazīd. A message was sent to them in which there was a promise to inform them of their fate. When the prisoners are sent to Yazīd, he justifies his action and indicates that he was unwilling that such a thing should happen. The report describes his good treatment of the prisoners, and even the praise of his treatment by one of them.³⁸

This report should be seen in conjunction with another isolated report by Ibn al-Kalbī, which has clearly pro-Yazīd tendencies. In it, Yazīd expresses regret for the death of the Imam and puts the blame on Ibn Ziyād.

'Awāna, in his narrative, seems to be presenting again a slant which diverts the blame for the killing of the Imam away from Yazīd and towards Ibn Ziyād. There is no mention of Yazīd's desecration of the Imam's head.

A report from 'Awāna, which has no support elsewhere, describes

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 309-11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 379-83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 374-6.

how Ibn Ziyād tries to get his letter instructing 'Umar b. Sa'd to attack the Imam al-Ḥusayn from 'Umar b. Sa'd, but 'Umar b. Sa'd has already used it as a justification for himself.³⁹

Thus insofar as the reports from 'Awāna which have been included in Ibn al-Kalbī's version may be taken as a sample of 'Awāna's full account, it would seem that 'Awāna is presenting an account which reduces the amount of blame attached to Yazīd in the affair. He is writing a marginally pro-Umayyad version. In his accounts of the battle of Siffin, it has been noted that 'Awāna tends to shift responsibility from Mu'āwiya to 'Amr b. al-'Ās.⁴⁰ The same operation appears to be taking place here with 'Awāna shifting the responsibility away from Yazīd to Ibn Ziyād and ultimately to his advisor, Sergius, for suggesting Ibn Ziyād's appointment.

Abū Mikhnāf's account survives in the reports taken by later writers from the recensions of Ibn al-Kalbī, Naṣr b. Muzāhim and al-Madā'inī. Ibn al-Kalbī's work is given in very full form by al-Ṭabarī. Al-Balādhurī tends to use the collective 'they said (*qālū*)'. But it is clear that the major source is Abū Mikhnāf. Abū al-Faraj uses both Naṣr b. Muzāhim's version and al-Madā'inī's, but he mainly relies on Naṣr b. Muzāhim's. It is clear from a comparison of the three texts that the fullest version is Ibn al-Kalbī's, but all three recensions indicate that sometimes narratives are compressed together and summarized. What emerges is a very full account based on numerous sources, where alternatives are put side by side.

As far as Abū Mikhnāf's reports are concerned, it can be said that he is anti-Umayyad and in favour of the Imam al-Ḥusayn, but whether he was actually a Shī'ī is questionable. Certainly, he is hostile to both Ibn Ziyād and Yazīd; both poke at the teeth in the head of the martyred Imam in his account.

Because of the nature of al-Ṭabarī's annalistic approach to history, Abū Mikhnāf's beginning of the account is missing, as it does not belong to events of the year 60. Part of it may be preserved by al-Balādhurī by using the collective term *qālū*. When the Imam al-Ḥasan died the Shī'ī in Iraq wrote to the Imam al-Ḥusayn to ask him to come to lead them. He wrote back reminding them of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁴⁰ E. L. Petersen, *All and Mu'āwiya in Early Arab Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1964), pp. 32, 48, 53.

agreement that his brother had made with Mu'āwiya and promising to lead them. Mu'āwiya heard that the people thought that the Imam al-Ḥusayn would lead them after his death and wrote to him warning him against this. The Imam al-Ḥusayn wrote back denouncing him. Thus the scene is set for the confrontation on the death of Mu'āwiya.

The variety of Abū Mikhnāf's stories and his statement about the majority of the reporters⁴¹ suggest that he was reporting from an existing literature. We have already discussed the accounts of al-Aṣḥab, Jābir and 'Ammār, and it is noticeable that he does not report from them. His work has already been closely examined by Ursula Sezkin; but she did not attempt to reconstruct possible literary sources, despite the thoroughness of her work.⁴²

Of the four major monographs by the most distinguished historians of the end of the second century, Ibn al-Kalbī, al-Wāqidi, Naṣr b. Muzāhim and al-Madā'inī, Ibn al-Kalbī is by far the best represented. Al-Ṭabarī has reported what is very probably almost the complete monograph. As we have already noted Ibn al-Kalbī relies very heavily on Abū Mikhnāf but he does use other narratives. He has one quotation from Jābir b. Yazīd and perhaps one from Aṣḥab b. Nuḥāta and he also uses 'Awāna. By and large, he follows Abū Mikhnāf in hostility both to Yazīd and to Ibn Ziyād. He does however supplement Abū Mikhnāf's reports, which we have already discussed.

Naṣr b. Muzāhim's monograph is reported in a very limited fashion by Abū al-Faraj in *Maqātil al-Talibiyyīn*.⁴³ He seems to have had two main sources: Abū Mikhnāf, whom he reports on the authority of his mentor 'Umar b. Sa'd, and Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fi, whom he reports through 'Amr b. Shamīr. Naṣr b. Muzāhim uses both of these sources in his monograph on the Battle of Siffin. If his full work had survived, we would have had a much fuller Shī'ī version of the account, as Naṣr was himself a Shī'ī, and tended to favour the Shī'ī tradition.

We have no clear idea of the account of al-Madā'inī. It is possible that it is the main source of al-Balādhurī for Abū Mikhnāf, but

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 314.

⁴² U. Sezkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-22.

⁴³ Abū al-Faraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-81.

al-Balādhurī introduces his account with the collective *qālū*. However, this version does not refer to the variation from 'Awāna which Ibn al-Kalbī has introduced into his account. Al-Madā'inī is used as a source by Abū al-Faraj for a report from al-Qasīm b. al-Aṣḡagh which has already been cited, and there are other reports from him which are not from Abū Mikhnāf. So clearly he used other material to supplement Abū Mikhnāf's account.

Unfortunately little or nothing survives of the monograph written by al-Wāqidī. It is claimed by both Ibn Nadīm and his secretary, Ibn Sa'd, that al-Wāqidī was a Shī'ī.⁴⁴ However, Shaykh al-Mufīd accuses him of being a member of the 'Uthmaniyya.⁴⁵ What al-Mufīd means by that is that al-Wāqidī had strong sympathies with the Zubayrid faction which had supported greater authority for Medina, and seen the family of Zubayr (and in particular his son, Ibn al-Zubayr) as the fittest people for the caliphate. If any of his account had survived, it would have been interesting to examine his treatment of Ibn al-Zubayr. The 'Uthmaniyya attitude to Ibn al-Zubayr with regard to this incident is clearly established in the work of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, and there is also a similar report in al-Balādhurī's *Anṣāb al-Ashrāf*.

Khalīfa b. Khayyāt is writing annalistic history, and therefore has to mention the death of the Imam al-Ḥusayn. He does so in the briefest form possible and gives a list of the members of the Imam's family who were killed. He devotes much more space to Yazīd's request of his governor, al-Walīd, that the oath of allegiance should be taken from Ibn al-Zubayr and the Imam al-Ḥusayn.⁴⁶

Before discussing his account, it will be necessary to look at the accounts that we have from Abū Mikhnāf. Ibn al-Kalbī's version has unified two separate reports from Abū Mikhnāf; they are given separately by al-Balādhurī. In the first, al-Walīd's messenger comes to Ibn Zubayr and the Imam al-Ḥusayn, and they make excuses for not attending. Al-Walīd concentrates his pressure on Ibn al-Zubayr by sending him messengers, and Ibn al-Zubayr escapes to Mecca. The report adds that al-Ḥusayn arrives there later, but there is no mention of any actual meeting with al-Walīd. It suggests that when

⁴⁴ E. L. Petersen, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Jamal*.

⁴⁶ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rīkh* (2nd ed., Beirut, 1977), pp. 231-6.

both men are in Mecca, Ibn al-Zubayr wants the Imam al-Ḥusayn to go to Kūfa to get him out of the way because he is jealous of his influence.⁴⁷

In the second report, Abū Mikhnāf speaks of a meeting between al-Walīd and the Imam al-Ḥusayn in the presence of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam in which the Imam puts of pledging allegiance to Yazīd and gets angry with Marwān for threatening to kill him.⁴⁸

The Uthmaniyya view of this event is somewhat different. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt gives an account from Wahb b. Jarīr on the authority of Abū Bakr Juwayriyya b. Asmā' al-Hudhālī, who says that he heard from so many scholars of Medina that he cannot count them. According to this, Yazīd's letter comes to al-Walīd. He sends for Marwān who advises him to make Ibn al-Zubayr and the Imam al-Ḥusayn pledge allegiance to Yazīd immediately. Ibn al-Zubayr arrives first and there follows a conversation which is almost identical with the one Abū Mikhnāf reported to have taken place with the Imam al-Ḥusayn. Al-Walīd orders them both to leave. The Imam al-Ḥusayn arrives, but nothing is said to him until both men return. The narrative is interrupted at this point by the omission of something, and then goes on with Marwān advising al-Walīd to appoint spies to watch Ibn al-Zubayr. Ibn al-Zubayr then makes his escape to Mecca and is followed later by the Imam al-Ḥusayn. In Mecca, he asks the Imam al-Ḥusayn why he has not gone to his supporters, adding that if he had such supporters, he would go to them.⁴⁹

Al-Balādhurī has another report from Wahb b. Jarīr which purports to come from a servant of Mu'āwiya.⁵⁰ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt reports the first half of it but prefers Abū Bakr al-Hudhālī's account of the actual meeting with al-Walīd.⁵¹ In this report, Zurayq, the servant of Mu'āwiya, brings the message to al-Walīd from Yazīd. It is a very colourful account which gives details of the clothes all the main characters are wearing. Al-Walīd is full of bitter grief at the death of Mu'āwiya and sends for

⁴⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb al-Ashraf* (Beirut, 1979), IV/2, 299–301.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 302–3; cf. al-Tabarī, *op. cit.*, pp. 216–19.

⁴⁹ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–3.

⁵⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *op. cit.*, pp. 309–10.

⁵¹ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *op. cit.*, pp. 232.

Marwān. Marwān advises that the men should be sent for. The Imam al-Ḥusayn arrives first, followed by Ibn al-Zubayr; then a new character arrives, 'Abd Allāh b. Muti', who is a supporter of Ibn al-Zubayr. Al-Walīd announces the death of Mu'āwiya and calls upon them to pledge allegiance. It is Ibn al-Zubayr who takes it on himself to answer and he persuades al-Walīd to let them delay it until the morning. Al-Walīd does so and they all escape.

Clearly these two 'Uthmaniyya accounts are meant to build up the reputation of Ibn al-Zubayr at the expense of the Imam al-Ḥusayn. They seem like propaganda. Abū Bakr al-Hudhālī gives us as his authority countless scholars of Medina but does not name one of them. When compared with Abū Mikhnāf's tradition, it is obvious that one of them is based on the other and it seems probable that Abū Mikhnāf's account is the earlier. The second account is full of such great detail with regard to the clothes people were wearing as to suggest that it was written by a fashion critic. Clearly, these details are meant to establish its authenticity, but they rather tend to suggest that it is a fabrication.

Other fragments of the 'Uthmaniyya version of events survive in the *Anṣāb al-Ashraf* of al-Balādhurī. In the first, Wahb b. Jarīr describes briefly the coming of Ibn Ziyād to Kūfa and his demanding Hanī b. 'Urwa to hand over Muslim. When he refuses, he has him executed and then seizes Muslim. He takes Muslim out on the balcony and demands that Muslim say: 'I am Muslim b. 'Aqīl, the leader of rebels.' Muslim says it and then Ibn Ziyād executes him.⁵² This isolated report manages again to undermine the bravery of such men as Muslim, and by implication the *ahl al-bayt*, by making Muslim repeat such words. Such a story is not to be found elsewhere in the sources.

Another report, again from Wahb b. Jarīr, concerns the Imam al-Ḥusayn addressing the army of 'Umar b. Sa'd before the battle. It is not surprising that even this tries to undermine the Imam al-Ḥusayn. He is reported to have asked the Kūfans: 'Shall I submit to the rule of Yazīd?' To which the reply came: 'You must submit to the rule of Ibn Ziyād.' This the Imam al-Ḥusayn refused to do, and the battle took place. The implication of the report is that the

⁵² Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb al-Ashraf*, (Beirut, 1974), II, 86.

Imam al-Ḥusayn was prepared to submit to Yazīd. This seems to attempt to undermine his stature and to make an unfavourable comparison with Ibn al-Zubayr, the hero of the later 'Uthmaniyya resistance to Yazīd.⁵³

Al-Balādhurī's account, which is split up into sections in his life of Muslim, his life of Yazīd, and his life of the Imam al-Ḥusayn, gives the impression of being the most historically balanced, in the sense of presenting all possible versions. The kernel of the account is presented with a collective *qālū* (=they said) but if the earlier surmise is correct, it is probably based on al-Madā'inī's monograph, which, in turn, was based on Abū Mikhnāf. However, al-Balādhurī also gives the more hostile reports of Wahb b. Jarīr, as well as other sources. As already noted, he gives some reports from 'Awāna, but not through Ibn al-Kalbī. He also uses a brief account from Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Rahmān.⁵⁴ This account is also used by al-Ṭabarī. This account is brief and adds nothing to our knowledge of the historical tradition. It does present the view that the Imam al-Ḥusayn was prepared to submit to Yazīd but refused to submit to Ibn Ziyād. It also reports that Yazīd wept when the head of the dead Imam was brought to him.

From the point of view of historiography, al-Balādhurī's version is very useful. It is, however, questionable whether al-Balādhurī was just being an unbiased historian reporting all the accounts available to him. On occasions al-Balādhurī is known to mention two accounts and say which one is correct. Nowhere in his presentation of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn does he do this. The use of the collective *qālū* makes much of the account sound very unverifiable, whereas the alternatives to the general account are given with full chains of authority. This makes them look more authentic. Thus accounts which undermine the stature of the Shī'ī Imam are included in a way that seems to be intended as a correction of the general account. This in no way means that he is not sympathetic to the plight of the Imam. He clearly is, but he is concerned to undermine the Shī'ī conception of the Imamate, and this will be the case if he brings forward accounts which in some

⁵³ Al-Balādhurī, *op. cit.*, III, 227.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

way undermine the stature of the man. A particularly good example of that is his report of the three options the Imam al-Husayn is said to have offered 'Umar b. Sa'd and the Kūfāns. He reports that fully, but ignores Abū Mikhnāf's earlier report that no one knew what 'Umar b. Sa'd and the Imam al-Husayn talked about. He merely adds a paragraph of the third account, without giving it the authority of 'Uqba b. Sim'ān, the Imam's servant. In fact, he reports that 'it is said' that Ibn Ziyād only asked the Imam to return to Medina. The very use of the words 'it is said' implies that this should not be accepted as a truthful report, but rather should be considered as an unidentified and unlikely claim.

At the end of his account al-Balādhurī includes some of the reports of the sky raining down blood, but these reports would suggest that the tragedy of the death of the Imam al-Husayn was such because of his blood relation with the Prophet rather than because of his status as an Imam.⁵⁵

Al-Dīnawārī gives us a fairly full account.⁵⁶ In the main, it seems to follow the traditional account, but it was probably based on a later recension of Abū Mikhnāf's work. On two points in the account he introduces material that differs from what has been reported earlier. He presents an account of Ibn al-Zubayr trying to persuade the Imam al-Husayn not to go to Kūfa but to carry out his resistance to Yazīd from the Hijāz.⁵⁷ This may be a survival of a Zubayrid Medinan tradition which supported Ibn al-Zubayr, but did not want to denigrate the Imam al-Husayn. The other point is that al-Dīnawārī does not mention the three options often alleged to have been offered by the Imam to 'Umar b. Sa'd. As far as he is concerned, the Imam only said that he was willing to go back, but Ibn Ziyād insisted that he pledge allegiance to Yazīd.⁵⁸

In effect, al-Dīnawārī's version is basically presenting the standard version with a high degree of sympathy and support for the Imam al-Husayn.

It is surprising that al-Ya'qūbī, who was almost certainly a Shī'ī, has devoted little space to the account of the martyrdom of the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁶ Al-Dīnawārī, *al-Akhhār al-Tiwāl* (Cairo, 1960), pp. 229-62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Imam al-Ḥusayn in his history.⁵⁹ It seems to be a mere summary of Abū Mikhnāf's account, with the addition at the end of a miraculous tradition. According to this, the Prophet had given Umm Salāma some soil which he had received from the angel Gabriel. This would turn red when the Imam al-Ḥusayn was killed. When that happened, Umm Salāma tearfully announced the death of the Imam in Medina, at the time that it had happened at Karbalā'.⁶⁰

He strays slightly from Abū Mikhnāf's account in suggesting that both the Imam al-Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Zubayr went to see al-Walīd together when he summoned them to pledge allegiance to Yazīd.⁶¹ Generally al-Ya'qūbī's account gives the impression of being a rather hurried summary of Abū Mikhnāf and it does not add appreciably to our knowledge of the historical tradition.

Al-Ṭabarī's account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn has long been regarded as the definitive account. He gives the *isnād* of the account that he uses, and interrupts the narrative to give other alternative or confirmatory traditions. In the main he relies on Ibn al-Kalbī and 'Ammār b. Mu'āwiya al-Duhrī. Al-Ṭabarī seems to be using 'Ammār's version as a means of interpreting Ibn al-Kalbī's. Thus he gives the first half of 'Ammār's version first, and then follows it with Ibn al-Kalbī's fuller version. He then presents the second half of 'Ammār's version, followed by the second half of Ibn al-Kalbī's. On two occasions he interprets Ibn al-Kalbī with differing reports from 'Umar b. Shabba,⁶² and he concludes his account with the brief version of Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Rahmān—similar to that of al-Balādhurī. What emerges looks at first glance to be the authoritative version of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Ḥusayn. However, this is not quite the case. As already mentioned, the annalistic nature of the work means that the agreement made by Mu'āwiya with the Imam al-Ḥasan, and the death of the Imam al-Ḥasan and the letters of the Kūfans, are not reported. The surprising thing is that, in what purports to be a comprehensive history, they are not reported elsewhere in the text.

⁵⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh* (Najaf, 1964), II, 229-33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, 242-6, 272.

The other annalistic historians, al-Ya'qūbī, al-Dīnawārī, and Ibn A'thām do not report them. These omissions must make us question al-Ṭabarī's motive. The answer to this problem will lie in a more comprehensive study than this, which is limited to the account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn.

We have already noted that the use of 'Ammar's version is intended to be an interpretation of Ibn al-Kalbī's, and thus weakens the stature of the Imam. This is probably deliberately done by al-Ṭabarī. However, he ignores, at least in this account, material from the 'Uthmaniyya.

Ibn A'thām al-Kūfī gives us the most embellished account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn. He prefaces his account by including lists of *isnāds*, which he claims are his sources.⁶³ These lists are muddled, and seem like an attempt to show that this is indeed an authoritative account. Ibn A'thām's exaggeration in his authorities sets the tone for the rest of the account. It is based on what has become the standard version, but it is that standard version in a very embellished form. Each individual battle is prefaced by verses, most of which are not reported by any other source. The prowess in the battle of the Imam al-Husayn's followers and the Imam himself is such that one is surprised that they were not victorious. In his partisan approach, Ibn A'thām forgets that it is a tragedy which is taking place. The same tendency to exaggerate is a feature also of the account attributed to Abū Mikhnāl. Such treatment diminishes the real story of the Imam's sufferings and places it in the realm of a peculiar kind of hagiography. Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī deals with the martyrdom of al-Husayn in his *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*. The work, as its name suggests, is a survey of the persecution of the descendants of Abū Ṭālib. His account is brief in comparison with al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, but he does give a useful account.⁶⁴ His main authority is Naṣr b. Muzāhim but he also uses al-Madā'inī. A third authority of Abū al-Faraj—and one he uses throughout his book—is Yahya b. al-Ḥasan. The latter is also an authority of al-Mufīd for his *Kitāb al-Irshād*, and he seems to have written a

⁶³ Ibn A'thām, *Kitāb al-Fatūḥ* (Hyderabad, 1971), IV, 209-10. The whole narrative is IV, 209-24, and V, 8-252.

⁶⁴ Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-81.

The other annalistic historians, al-Ya'qūbī, al-Dīnawārī, work on the descendants of the Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The account supplements the reports of Abū Mikhnāf, but by and large it acts as confirmation that al-Ṭabarī's use of Ibn al-Kalbī is authentic.

The last writer in the list of authorities is Shaykh al-Mufīd. In his work *Kitāb al-Irshād*,⁶⁵ he presents an account of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn. He claims that his authorities are Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Madā'inī. In fact, he seems mostly to have used Ibn al-Kalbī in al-Ṭabarī's recension. On one occasion he uses an alternative to Ibn al-Kalbī which al-Ṭabarī has provided concerning Ibn Ziyād's entry into Kūfa,⁶⁶ but without indicating a different source. Al-Mufīd does, however, make the beginning of the story clear by giving those events prior to Mu'āwiya's death which al-Ṭabarī has omitted.

The historiographical study of this event shows how the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn became an important subject for historians from an early time. Despite attempts by some to diminish the stature of the Imam, the historical tradition has, by and large, preserved the general picture of heroism and sacrifice. The reality, in the simpler stories, has conveyed a more profound effect than the embellishments of some later writers. It was the martyrdom that gave rise to the historical writings, and the historical writings have carried on the tradition of the martyrdom to inspire men throughout the years since the tragic event.

⁶⁵ Al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 299-372.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

THE MARTYRDOM OF HUSAYN B. 'ALĪ AND THE CONTINUITY OF ETHICAL CONCEPTS AND MORAL CODES

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THE crucial question that civilized human society has had to face and answer through history is that of the relevance of ethical concepts and moral codes to individual conscience and social conduct. Now obviously, the primary biological drives are firmly centered, firstly, on the individual self, and next, on the proximate biogenetic group. The rest of the prerequisites of life and biological survival, and the necessary natural biospheric balances, are the result of symbiotic and ecological interdependence of all forms of life. However, civilized human society has always had yet another essential and very necessary dimension, that of rational communication. But that is not the end of the matter, for rational communication carries the quality of creative causality, extending itself into richer and more refined realms of consciousness, namely, that of the awareness of social and moral responsibility. Without this extension of rationality into morality, rational communication would remain intellectually limited and human society would be culturally poor. And why this would be is so obviously because, in addition to rationality, morality, ethics, and conscience are equally, and even more significantly, distinctive characteristics of all that which humanity connotes. When rational consciousness matures further through the awareness and assumption of moral and social

responsibility, it acquires the additional mental characteristic of conscience. Therefore, finally, the emergence of conscience involves a moral sensitivity of responsiveness resulting from adequately comprehensive knowledge of facts and their interrelationships together with correctness and clarity of cognition. By its very definition, conscience implies intellectual acuity along with intellectual honesty and sincerity. Thus cynicism, no matter how intelligent, and fanaticism, no matter how pious, would be equally repugnant to conscientiousness.

Now since conscientiousness implies interaction and response, conscience would be inconceivable in isolation; it is only in the responsiveness of any individual in environmental and social situations with inanimate, animate, and human participants of this biosphere that an adequate idea of conscientiousness can be formed. In the inconceivably vast context of cosmic space-time continuum, human existence, in purely physical terms, is insignificant. But perhaps as a living, conscious, and, most notably, conscientious being, a human being is an extraordinarily significant phenomenon of nature. The rational capability of human nature affords it an astonishingly wide range of choices and options. At the same time, this raises the question of responsibility which often relates to a moral problem. And morality is relevant mainly in some social context. Now while rationality does not necessarily always tend to make us behave less selfishly or more selflessly, morality does tend to do so invariably. Thus it is that ethical principles and concepts, and moral codes and conscientious conduct, assume a paramount importance in human society, so as to prepare and equip us better for those self-sacrifices that morally responsible and socially answerable behaviour demands of us: *You will not attain piety until you expend of what you love; and whatever thing you expend God knows of it.* (3: 92)¹

Here is a clear statement of where the Qur'ān stands in regard to the controversy over the question of egoism versus altruism. And the same has been the stand of all the scriptures of the great universal religions of the world witnessed by human history. Along with the great scriptures, human history has also witnessed great

¹ A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1983), p. 57.

self-sacrifices, many of which, by any measure, may have truly been the ultimate in a particular historical context. In terms of history and humanity, these selfless persons were the true witnesses of human destiny—the martyrs for a great cause, the cause of truth, justice, and love. It was these great martyrs (*shuhadā'*) who contributed most eminently to the continuity of ethical principles and concepts and moral codes and conscientious conduct in all human affairs and relationships throughout history. The condition of altruism stated in the Qur'ānic verse quoted above is the initial step and the minimal stipulation for attaining moral virtue; and it is in line with what has been indicated in other great religious scriptures for realizing spiritual excellence. Ultimately, such a spiritual quest and such a moral effort could possibly attain enlightenment, which, in the words of Professor Zaehner, 'so far as it can be described at all, is to see the ineffable One in the many, the eternal Now in the Flux of Time, unity in diversity (or diversity in unity), a discordant concord and a concordant discord,' and he goes on to add that 'this is the Truth,' and furthermore, 'for the Truth is that All is One and One is All, now, everywhere, and forever.' Zaehner concludes by asking what 'personal communion with God' is, and answers in the words of another writer: 'to pass from our normal state of self-consciousness into cosmic consciousness!'²

When the egocentric or self-centered view of life and the world expands on such a cosmic scale as to merge the self into the Creator's divine will which is the scheme of creation, this cognitive expansion is accompanied by a commensurate moral elevation from selfishness to selflessness, from egoism to altruism, provided that cognition is genuine. In this context, it is very important to remember that, neither spiritually nor metaphysically, would it do to think of the Creator or God as a person; and, therefore, the divine will and the scheme of creation too cannot be conceived in personal terms but rather as a mystery that the human mind may strive to comprehend by means of contemplation, moral conduct and the experience ensuing therefrom. The idea of divine unity, ubiquitous and all-embracing, pervasive and all-encompassing, and

² R. C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 38-9.

creative and all-sustaining, is the basis of universal justice and cosmic harmony. In such an infinitely vast and awesome conceptual context, egoism would be ridiculously inappropriate and absurd, both morally and intellectually. From these fundamental concepts of divinity, namely unity and justice, elaborated above, the rest of the religious concepts follow necessarily and immediately: the necessity of a divinely inspired spiritual leader and guide; once the divinely inspired guide has passed away, the necessity of the continuity of spiritual leadership and moral guidance; and, lastly, the consequential and final divine judgement of all and every human action and conduct.

The conflict of the respective ethical theories relating to egoism and altruism have been discussed by thinkers down through the ages, from Plato and Aristotle to Moore and Broad, analytically and eruditely.³ Our present concern, however, is how these two opposite attitudes, egoism and altruism, have generally found expression in the wider social and historical context, in words and deeds and in thought and action, in the past. Therefore, let us begin by noting what contains not only the essence of some of the profound and humane ideals taught by inspired seers and guides of humanity from Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ up to Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, but also an elaboration of these teachings. Here, as follows, are two short extracts from a long testament of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, the son-in-law and cousin of the prophet of Islam and the father of Hasan and Ḥusayn, given to his son, Ḥasan, as paternal advice:

My dear son! In your dealings with others, let your *self* be like the two scales of a balance: desire for others the same as you would desire for yourself, and shun for others what you shun for yourself; and do not oppress others just as you would not like yourself to be oppressed; and do good to others just as you would like others to do good to yourself; and regard as loathsome in yourself that which you find loathsome in others; and let it be acceptable to yourself from others whatever would be acceptable to them from yourself; and say nothing of what you know if what you know is very little; and say not what you would not like to be said to you. And heed my word! Conceit is the contrary of rectitude and an affliction of the mind. . . .

³ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 85–105, 165–162; C. D. Broad, *Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy* (London, 1971), pp. 262–282.

... [A]nd swallow your anger for I have never known any draught sweeter than it in aftertaste and more long-lasting in deliciousness; and be meek towards him who is harsh towards you for he will soon become meek towards you; and be magnanimous towards your enemy for that is the more pleasant of the two alternative manners of triumph. . . .⁴

Somewhere between the two extracts quoted above is another set of moral observations that balance the gentleness and mildness of the former with their moral sagacity and firm integrity:

Never give yourself in bondage to anyone when God has granted you freedom! What good can come from goodness that cannot be procured except through evil or from prosperity that cannot be attained but through misery?⁵

On the basis of such moral ideals as cited through the three foregoing quotations from the testament of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib to his son, Ḥasan, it would be possible to form a clearer idea of the ethical principles and moral traditions received from his spiritual predecessors—such as Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, through Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, the prophet of Islam—and consequently extended by him to formulate his socio-political thinking and his policy of government and statecraft. These were, as may be clearly seen from his instructions to his provincial governors, transparently sincere and moral, and free of any taint or trace of political expediency and strategem. Obviously, his sole objective was the widest possible communication of the moral message, both by word and deed, and irrespective of personal political consequences. His life's purpose was not to hold on to political power at any cost but to put into practice the principles he professed and genuinely held. In the course of a letter to 'Uthmān b. Hunayf al-Anṣārī, his governor in Basra, he pointedly observes:

And had I wished, I could have certainly found the way to get for myself clarified honey, refined wheat, and raw silk, but far be it from me that my desires get the better of me and my greed leads me to prefer for myself the delicacies of food while there may be in the Hijaz or al-Yamāma someone who has never satiated his hunger, or that I retire for the night with a full stomach while around me there are hungry stomachs and thirsty livers.

⁴ *Nahj al-balāgha* (Beirut), III, 45-6, 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

Should I rest satisfied with being addressed as Ruler of the Believers (*amir al-mu'minīn*) and not suffer with them the adversities of these times?⁶

Continuing further along the same line of inquiry, let us now note some of the main points of a covenant, of quite some length and detail, that was given by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to his governor-designate of Egypt, Mālik b. al-Ḥarīth al-Asḥār al-Nakhā'ī, who, however, was destined never to reach Egypt but to die, while on his way, at the hands of those who poisoned him on the instigation of the political opponents of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib:

Then be aware of this, O Mālik: that I am sending you to a land which prior to you has had both just and oppressive governments, and the people will scrutinize your affairs in the same manner in which you used to scrutinize the affairs of the governors who preceded you, and they will say about you what you used to say about them who were there before you. . . . So let the most desirable treasure for yourself be the treasure of good works, . . . and let there be a deep feeling of compassion and love and kindness in your heart towards the governed, and be not to them like a carnivorous predator, waiting to devour them, for they are of two categories: either a brother to you in faith, or your equal, corresponding to yourself, in God's creation. . . . And if, because of the power that you possess, you ever get the feeling of arrogance or conceit, then just look at the greatness of God's sovereignty and authority over yourself against which nothing can avail you. . . .

Be fair and equitable to God and the people on your own part and on the part of your close relatives and anyone you may be inclined to favour from amongst those you govern, for if you do not do so, you will commit oppression; and God will be the adversary, on behalf of the people, of everyone who oppresses others, . . . for God heeds the call for help of those who are persecuted, and is ever watchful against oppressors.

Surely, the most desirable manner of government for you would be the most moderate in terms of rights, the most universal in terms of justice, and the most comprehensive in terms of popular consent; for the anger of the common people annuls the approval of the privileged class, but the anger of the privileged class can be ignored with the support of the common people's approval.⁷

After this, he goes on to mention the number of weaknesses of

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

character and temperament that the members of the privileged class generally have, and which, therefore, make them much less of a social asset than those who are commoners; and on that account he counsels more concern for the latter, and more attention to their affairs. What follows in this long and detailed covenant is based upon this compassionate, just, and egalitarian foundation of both social and moral as well as religious principles and ideals. The full text of the covenant is too long to reproduce here. I have, therefore, confined myself to some representative quotations, given above, from the introductory first tenth of it. Described concisely, it may truly be called one of the earliest and best charters of human rights known to us in history.

Surely, it was this social outlook, based upon ethical principles and concepts and a moral code of conduct, which gave rise to that attitude of reluctance to hold on to political power at any cost demonstrated by his successor and eldest son, Ḥasan b. 'Alī. Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān's opposition to al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī was obviously a continuation of the former's obdurate opposition to Ḥasan's father, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and also, even more fundamentally, of that of Mu'āwiya's father, Abū Sufyān, to Ḥasan's maternal grandfather, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, the holy prophet of Islam. When, after years of long, bitter, and ruthless opposition to Islam, Abū Sufyān had to submit to its steadily growing influence in Arab society, his utter misconception of its spiritual nature and egalitarian message became very evident in a remark that he made to his erstwhile friend and kinsman, who was an uncle of the holy Prophet himself, 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭālib. Watching from a hilltop the Muslim followers of the Prophet, the majority of whom were from the underprivileged strata of Arab society, marching *en masse*, but unarmed, as had been agreed between them and their opponents, the privileged Quraysh, towards Mecca for the performance of the first Muslim pilgrimage to the mosque at the Ka'ba, Abū Sufyān remarked to 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭālib with amazement how his nephew's royal authority (*mulk*) had grown, to which 'Abbās replied by pointing out that it was not 'royal authority' but the communication and propagation of a moral and

spiritual message, the apostolic mission entrusted to his nephew, Muhammad, by divine inspiration.⁸

This misconception of the apostolic mission of Islam by the Quraysh, the privileged group of Arab society to which the holy Prophet himself belonged, but with whose vested interests he resolutely refused to identify himself, and their persistent and obdurate opposition to it continued down the line from one generation to the next. In the opinion of Ibn Khaldūn, the two main socio-political factors that really mattered in human society in general, and in Arab society in particular, were those of group solidarity or group feeling based on kinship (*'aṣabiyya*), and dominion or royal authority (*mulk*); the former constantly and persistently impelling the group, whether it be tribe, clan, family, to aim to acquire the latter so as to arrogate all glory and supremacy to exclusively to themselves.⁹ Significantly, Milton, in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, ascribes such traits of character to none other than Satan himself:

... who, not content
With fair equality, fraternal state,
Will arrogate dominion undeserved
Over his bretheren.

Ibn Khaldūn, also, while explaining the desire for dominion and royal authority, uses a similar expression: *al-infirād bi 'l-majd*. Now such expressions in any of the great religions are reserved for the Supreme, Unique Being, or God. For any mortal to aspire to such supremacy over the rest of his fellow creatures and mortals would not only be absurd but also either insane and therefore excusable, or blasphemous and inexcusable.

I have discussed the problems pertinent to this topic elsewhere under the title *Some Aspects of Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Political Analysis of History—A Critical Appreciation* at some length, and since it would be a digression from the main theme of the conference to repeat all that I have said in it here, I will limit myself to the following relevant remarks based upon what I concluded there.

⁸ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyya* (1955), II, 404.

⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, tr. F. Rosenthal I, ch. 3, §23-28.

Any socio-political exposition and its theory that attaches undue importance to group-centered feeling and solidarity exclusively is bound to be limited in both scope and outlook. And, based upon this, if it goes on to establish in theory the natural, and therefore necessary legitimacy of the arrogation of domination and supremacy by a member of the group that is impelled solely by feeling of kinship, then it would not only be limited in scope and outlook, but also at variance with the morality of all the great scriptures, including the Qur'ān, as well as in conflict with the great moral philosophies relevant to human society and its individuals. And, lastly, such ruthlessly narrow theories of *al-'aṣabiyya* and *al-mulk* tend to become self-contradictory and confusing when they attempt to reconcile their concepts with those of religious morality and social ethics.¹⁰ Thinkers like Ibn Khaldūn, and Machiavelli after him, tend to defend despotism (*al-istibādād*), and, despite their intelligence, become the narrow advocates and philosophers of the establishment and its bureaucratic objectives.

The letter addressed to Ḥasan b. 'Alī from Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān reveals the self-centered preconceptions that develop under the pressures and compulsions that Ibn Khaldūn calls *al-'aṣabiyya* and *al-mulk*. It is evident how these preconceptions, arising from egocentrism, are often, unjustifiably and ignorantly, projected onto everyone else indiscriminately. The English rendering of the Arabic text of the letter is as follows:

This is a letter to Ḥasan b. 'Alī from Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān. I have made peace with you on the undertaking that after me the authority of government will pass to you, and you have the oath by God and God's covenant and security, and the security of God's Messenger, Muḥammad, may God's blessing and peace be upon him, the most firm pledge and binding contract that God has imposed upon anyone amongst God's creatures, that I shall not desire [or attempt] any treacherous or adverse actions against you, and that I shall give you one million silver coins per annum from the public treasury, and that the tribute from Passa and Darabjurd will be yours; you may send your appointees there and do whatsoever you may deem fit.¹¹

¹⁰ S. M. A. Imam, *Some Aspects of Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Political Analysis of History—A Critical Appreciation* (Karachi, 1978).

¹¹ Ṭaḥa Husayn, *'Alī wa-banūh* (Cairo, 1953), p. 200.

The response of Ḥasan b. 'Alī to this tempting offer was in the moral tradition of his father, 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, and his grandfather, Muḥammad, and in complete contrast to it. On the blank sheet of paper that Mu'āwiya had sent Ḥasan, and at the bottom of which he had affixed his seal, he had authorized Ḥasan to put down whatever he pleased to do. Al-Ḥasan, while retaining Mu'āwiya's letter, cited above, wrote as follows:

This is what Ḥasan b. 'Alī has agreed to for making peace with Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān: he has made peace with him on the undertaking that he will surrender to him [Mu'āwiya] the authority of government on the condition that he will act in accordance with the dictates of the Book of God and the tradition of God's prophet and the conduct of the virtuous successors of the prophet, and that it would not be permissible to him that he may take the pledge for and appoint anyone as his successor and that the succession will be in accordance with the decision of the advisory council, and that the people, wherever they are, will have complete security in regard to themselves, their belongings and their families, and that he will not desire [or attempt] any treachery against Ḥasan, neither covertly nor overtly, and that he will not intimidate any of Ḥasan's friends.¹²

When the peace agreement was finally drawn up it was along the lines indicated in the response of Ḥasan b. 'Alī in the letter cited above.¹³ After the acceptance and signing of the peace, on Mu'āwiya's insistence, Ḥasan addressed the people who had assembled there on the occasion. After the customary eulogy of God, he said that the shrewdest of all conducts is piety and that the folly of follies is impiety, and that the question of rightful authority was best left to be judged and settled on the criteria of the conduct of the ruler in accordance with the book of God and the tradition of God's prophet, and that one who acts in an oppressive manner is not a genuine successor of the Prophet, but a king who derives benefit from it, although its pleasures come to a sudden end. Then he went on to explain that he had withdrawn from the dispute in order to avoid bloodshed among the people. He ended his address by saying that perhaps it was both a trial and a provision for them for some time.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹³ Muḥsin al-Amīn, *'Ayān al-shī'a*, p. 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48. Also Ibn al-'Asākir al-Shāfi'i, *Tarjamat al-imām al-Ḥasan min*

What followed the signing of this peace agreement was not all that unexpected. The agreement was swiftly folded up and brazenly set aside, and all its conditions and clauses were flouted with impunity and without any qualms of conscience. From the cruel oppression of the people in general to the torture and execution of eminent members of the groups opposed to the autocratic and despotic rule of the Umayyads and their officials, and then even up to the conspiratorial and treacherous act of administering a lethal poison to the Imam Ḥasan, everything was done without fear of God or love for God's creatures, in direct contravention of all that had been solemnly agreed upon in the peace agreement. And once the tyrannical authority of the Umayyad clan, under Mu'āwiya's cheftanship, had been established with the assistance of ruthless and cruel officials such as Ziyād b. Abīh, the solidarity of kinship, based on the tribal group feeling of the Quraysh, and, within it centrally, of the Umayyad clan and the family of Abū Sufyān, was ready to aim for the royal authority of its chief. This was finally established by the formal appointment of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya as his royal successor and by obtaining for him the oath of allegiance from all those whose influence counted amongst the important tribes and clans of Arab society. Thus the final nail was hammered into the coffin of the peace agreement, the text of which was already a dead letter in the eyes of all those in whom the Umayyads had successfully revived the pre-Islamic atavistic solidarity of kinship based on group feeling, or what Ibn Khaldūn calls *al-'aṣabiyya*, and whose natural tendency, according to him, is the establishment of dominion or royal authority.¹⁵

Very soon, however, the unwelcome influence of those who had betrayed both the fundamental principles of religion and the moral values of human society by swearing allegiance to the royal succession of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya became unacceptable, since it became widely known that the allegiance had been given either in return for material benefits or under duress. The stark harshness and heartless cruelties of the oppressive and ruthless Umayyad regime jolted them out of their apathy and made them recall, in

ta'rīkh madīna wa-dimashq (Beirut, 1980), pp. 189-190.

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, I, 444; also Ṭaha Husayn, pp. 205-259; and Jurjī Zaydān, *Ta'rīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1905), pp. 50-104.

clear contrast, the moral and benign rule of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. They also remembered that the holy Prophet had condemned and rejected both group feeling and bigotry (*al-ta'aṣub*), as well as the 'natural goal' of the former, namely, autocratic dominion or royal authority, and that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had adhered strictly, in both word and deed, to these moral teachings of the Master.¹⁶ This social re-awakening and moral awareness had already taken place during the lifetime of the Imam Ḥasan b. 'Alī, accompanied by a clearer political perception. However, when the Imam Ḥasan was no longer alive and Mu'āwiya felt free to announce the appointment of his own son Yazīd as heir-apparant to the so-called Caliphate, the people were simply outraged by this blatant violation of the last remaining condition of the peace agreement. And as if this arrogant and arbitrary flouting of all standards of decency and morality was in itself not enough, Mu'āwiya went on to demand that, along with other eminent persons, Imam Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, the younger brother and spiritual successor of Imam Ḥasan and the holy Prophet's second grandson, should also give his allegiance to Yazīd.¹⁷

Comparing the respective personalities of Mu'āwiya and his son Yazīd, Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn writes that while the former had grown up in the tribal environment of the Quraysh in Mecca during the *jahiliyya* period (i.e. during pre-Islamic times), with its hard and rough conditions that were inevitable in that barren valley, the latter was born and bred in a palace in Damascus, surrounded by luxury and retinues of slaves to hearken to his biddings and comply with his whims and wishes without delay. From his mother he had inherited the roughness of nomadic bedouin ways, and from his father the shrewdness and wile of the Quraysh, as well as their resourcefulness in strategems and their love for riches and power. Consequently, Yazīd could not tolerate any lack of promptness on the part of anyone in rendering him obedience; he regarded this as obligatory on everyone and, therefore, whosoever held back or hesitated in doing so, for him he had no other response but the sword. Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn goes on to say that when Mu'āwiya failed to compel four very eminent men of Medina to give their approval to his proposal for the appointment of his son, Yazīd to succeed him as the Caliph,

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, I, ch. 3, §26, pp. 414-15.

¹⁷ Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn, pp. 206, 246-48.

that is to say as the successor of the holy Prophet, and to swear allegiance to the appointee, he forced them to hold their peace by threatening to have them killed if they uttered a word against him and his plan for Yazīd's succession. And these four very eminent men were the the Imam Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umār, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, and 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr. The last of them did not survive Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, thus leaving the three who did survive him to face the menace of a despotic monarchy.¹⁸

It is quite evident that, from Abū Sufyān through Mu'āwiya up to Yazīd, no one amongst the Umayyads ever appreciated or accepted the moral and spiritual nature of the Islamic message as preached by its holy prophet, Muḥammad. For each and every one of them, it always was and always remained an opportunity and a means of acquiring absolute power in the form of royal autocratic authority and despotic dominion, or what Ibn Khaldūn calls *al-mulk*.¹⁹ Another point worthy of consideration here is that not necessarily everyone was moulded in the same manner in which Mu'āwiya was moulded by the hard and rough character of the pre-Islamic period. Zuhair b. Abī Salma, a well-known poet of the period immediately prior to the advent of Islam, is noted for his poetry of peace, love, and kindness; and the same is true of many others with Christian learnings as well as of those who were known as the *hunafā'*. The pact of amity known as *ḥilf al-fuḍūl* is yet another fine example of the natural inclination of some members of the Quraysh for justice and compassion, even in pre-Islamic times.²⁰ What may have been true of some or even of many of the members of the tribe of Quraysh was not necessarily true of all of them. What we actually see here is a combination of some of the hereditary family traits of the Umayyads, and their family traditions. And in the case of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, these familial traits and traditions, in the midst of an outrageously imbalanced combination of unbounded pelf and unbridled power, assumed a formidably sinister authority.²¹

One does not have to look far to discover how so much pelf and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-48, 258-9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-48.

²⁰ Ibn Hishām, p. 133.

²¹ Ṭaha Ḥusayn, pp. 258-59.

power came to be concentrated in the hands of an ill-bred and self-centred youth. Not only did Mu'āwiya and the Umayyads rekindle the flames of harsh tribal group feelings, but they also set ablaze fires of racial hostility based on the idea of Arab superiority, both of which had been rejected and condemned by the holy Prophet. The Imam 'Alī b. Abī Tālib had established his spiritual and moral as well as his temporal authority on the same humane ideals as those of the holy Prophet. And then his spiritual successors, the Imam Ḥasan b. 'Alī and the Imam Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, following in the footsteps of their father and their grandfather, had held steadfastly to the straight path of these moral and humane traditions that regarded the fundamental principles of divine unity and divine justice as the basis for the universal justification of all creation. Though this was religion with the widest moral perspective, it was not the politics of autocratic authority which was available only by means of harsh group feeling and fierce racial hostility. So Mu'āwiya and his henchmen opted for the latter. Thus it was that, growing out of these harsh feelings and fierce hostilities, many concentric spheres of a socio-political hierarchy formed around the central position held by the ego of the despot or the autocrat, and it was into this central ego that all power and all privilege was concentrated. This is how the moral and socio-political change that Ibn Khaldūn calls the 'transformation of the Caliphate into royal authority' came about.²²

The nature of this transformation is explained further by Ibn Khaldūn as a change in the 'restraining influence' which, as he says, was present in the form of Islamic morality in the self or the conscience of every person in the social milieu of the Holy Prophet's time.²³ With these changes, namely the transformation of the Caliphate into royal authority, the nature of the restraining influence also changed from that of Islamic morality into group feeling and the sword of royal authority. This was an atavistic reversion to the pre-Islamic period, as Ibn Khaldūn himself admits.

²² Ibn Khaldūn, pp. 434; J. Zaydān, pp. 58-61, 74-78, 82-88, 102-104; Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn, pp. 246-248, 256; 'Abbās Mahmūd al-Aqqād, *Abqariyyat al-imām* (Cairo, 1947), pp. 60-61, 144-158; Muḥammad Mahdī Shams al-Dīn, *Thawrat al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut), pp. 48-80.

²³ Ibn Khaldūn, pp. 426-427, 444.

However, insofar as the Qur'ān is concerned there is a consistent continuity and constancy of moral nature according to which human beings were created: *So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith—God's original upon which he originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the right religion; but most men know it not.* (30: 30)²⁴ Truth, whether perceived intuitively or inferred rationally and empirically, almost invariably turns out to be beautifully simple and clear, both conceptually and conductively. This is equally true in the sphere of religion and morality as it is in that of literature or science or philosophy. Complication and confusion are most often the results of the conflicts and contradictions that grow out of the odd mixture of cynicism and hypocrisy characteristic of self-centredness. Once the self-restraining influence of the human conscience had been swept aside by the brutal force of group feeling and the sword of royal authority, Islamic morality too was bound to fade into oblivion. Such a sorry state of social affairs called for the most selfless struggle and the highest self-sacrifice from the moral leaders of humanity present in that milieu. In view of his familial and environmental background, it is not so surprising that the unique distinction of answering this most urgent call should have gone to the Imam Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, the grandson of the holy Prophet. However, though no longer far off, the time had not arrived for him to say what he would say later to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar:

O 'Abd Allāh, it is surely the proof of the baseness of this world in the sight of God that the head of John [the Baptist] should be presented before a harlot of the people of Israel and that my head should be presented before a harlot of the Umayyads!²⁵

For the time being, the situation, as described accurately by Ṭahā Ḥusayn, was still confusing for the people in general, whose limited perceptive abilities had to be taken into consideration in order to ensure that the message got through to them fully and fairly, and that the group in power did not succeed in confusing the entire issue in the people's minds. Ṭahā Ḥusayn states that Ḥusayn

²⁴ A. J. Arberry, p. 414.

²⁵ 'Abd al-Rizzāq al-Mūsawī al-Muqarram, *Maqāt al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut, 1979), p. 138.

possessed great sagacity and had profound perception of the state of affairs then prevalent. Al-Husayn was aware that the authority to rule was completely in the hands of Mu'āwiya, and that all the lands were fully in his control; and he also knew well how Mu'āwiya appointed provincial governors who dealt with the inhabitants in a mercilessly harsh manner, and terrorized them, so that even when he broke all those solemn pledges on the basis of which allegiance had been given to him, namely, that of adhering to the code of conduct prescribed by the Book of God and the Tradition of the Messenger of God, even then it proved impossible to avail of any opportunity to head off a revolt against him. These pledges were definitely broken by Mu'āwiya repeatedly when he himself ordered the execution of some of the eminent and innocent inhabitants of Kūfa and again when he ordered the oath of allegiance for his son Yazīd, and thus transformed the Caliphate into a hereditary royal authority. Moreover, Mu'āwiya's squandering of the people's wealth on himself and his proteges, and his appointment of despotic provincial governors who also squandered the public funds—all of these actions annulled the very oath of allegiance that had initially given him the power and authority which he had abused so blatantly.²⁶

But the time was fast approaching when even the wiles of Mu'āwiya could not have stemmed the rising tide of the people's anger against the unending outrages that were being committed with impunity by his governors and minions upon all those who dared to show any sign of dissent or resentment. It was around this time that Mu'āwiya himself died, leaving the mess to be sorted out by his ill-bred son, Yazīd, and another equally ill-bred man, Ubayd Allāh, the son of Mu'āwiya's henchman, Ziyād b. Abīh, who had died a few years earlier. What Yazīd lacked of Mu'āwiya's resourcefulness in wiles and stratagems, he tried to make up by resorting to brute force, though not entirely so, for he had inherited, after all, along with royal authority, the wealth accumulated by his father and the means and methods of putting it to political use for exploiting the mercenary mentality that could be found at almost every social level in that milieu. The indulgent

²⁶ Ṭaḥa Husayn, pp. 213-214.

manner of his upbringing, of course, made a rather big difference in the way he attempted to coerce or oppress any particular group or the people in general from that of his father.

Against this formidable state-managed oppression, any revolutionary move had to avoid being misunderstood or misinterpreted by the mercenary jurists, who were under heavy obligation to the so-called caliph and his henchmen. These jurists would have dubbed such a movement as a contravention of Islamic law and tradition, and thus deserving to be crushed brutally. Any revolutionary action had to establish not only its social and moral justification but also its legal validity under Islamic law and tradition. Despite the care that had to be taken in such adverse circumstances, many mercenary jurists of the time either took up an openly hostile stance towards the Imam Ḥusayn's attempts to advocate reforms in the light of the Qur'ān and the Tradition of the holy Prophet, and his opposition to the royal authority of the so-called caliph, or they pretended to be neutral. So much confusion had been created in the minds of men that the issue of Ḥusayn's eventual martyrdom remained a controversial question for centuries to follow. An example of this was the superficially legalistic opinion expressed by the jurist Qāḍī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī al-Malikī, which is devoid of all moral perception, and in which he says that Ḥusayn was killed in accordance with the law of his own grandfather. Ibn Khaldūn, the well-known partisan of all that can be called Umayyad and Arab, disagrees with this judgement. He says that the jurist made a gross error in this opinion, because he overlooked the condition that no insurrection is permitted against a just leader or ruler. The iniquity of Yazīd had become self-evident from the fact that he was responsible for the killing of Ḥusayn. As for Ḥusayn, there was no one who was more just and upright a leader than he in the struggle against the selfish and the self-willed of those times.²⁷

Obviously, the Imam Ḥusayn was not a politician in any sense of the word, but was instead a spiritual leader and a moral teacher, and in that capacity no decisions could be made on purely political considerations. It was a situation identical to that of his

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, pp. 435-445; Ṭaha Ḥusain, pp. 61-66; 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, pp. 112-116, 154-155.

grandfather when he was opposed by Abū Sufyān, and also that of his father when Mu'āwiya confronted him with all his pre-Islamic egoism. The wheel had come full circle a second time—twice in five to six decades—showing how arduous and difficult the task of social reform and organization on moral principles was.

Moral perception cannot be forced upon anyone, for perception of anything in any form must come from the mind of the person who is to perceive. If this is true of the ordinary or trite experience pertaining to the physical and material world, how much more so is it of the world of ideas and concepts and their interrelationship. In situations that involve a conflict between the self and others, perception often tends to be affected by egoism. Thus the development of moral perception becomes impossible unless the ego or self gets positively involved in its social situation by identifying itself with it. This is often very difficult, for we all develop an egocentric view of the world. The study of science is one way of appreciating our individual insignificance. Wider and deeper knowledge does tend to increase perceptive ability. However, we are neither unacquainted with nor unaware of erudite egotists! Therefore, the question is: how do we go forward from knowledge to morality, from science to conscience? This question has been the central theme of all religions, and also of all moral and social philosophies. But the answers to it and solutions to the problems that relate to it have come not only in words but also in deeds. Although the two are really inseparable, deeds may have been the final proof of all that the words tried to express.

All that had been said by the prophet of Islam was being put to the final test, and it was on the shoulders of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī that the responsibility for appropriate action lay: the Qur'ān had to speak through his deeds. The Prophet had said of him:

Ḥusayn is of me, and I am of Ḥusayn (*al-Ḥusayn minnī wa ana min al-Ḥusayn*).

And the Qur'ān states that the Prophet never speaks as he wills or fancies personally, but only as he is divinely inspired (53: 3 and 4).

The Prophet's statement regarding Ḥusayn must be pondered. Obviously, a grandson is (*via* his parents) a product of his grandparents. But what is the implication of the second part of the

Prophet's statement, that he himself was of his grandson, except the hopes and confident expectations of the grandfather that the divinely inspired moral and spiritual message conveyed by him in words through the Qur'ān would be continued, after him, by Husayn b. 'Alī.

The aforementioned statement also demonstrates the humility of the Prophet, as do many verses of the Qur'ān, in disclaiming any exclusive right to guide humanity to righteousness, as well as his dedication to the continuity of the divinely inspired moral and spiritual message conveyed through him.²⁸ From Adam and Noah and Abraham, through Moses and Jesus, and right up to Muḥammad himself, the divinely-inspired moral and spiritual message had continued, and, thus, it had to continue after the prophet of Islam for as long as there were human beings needing guidance. So, in accordance with the hopes and expectations of his grandfather, the Imam Husayn was destined to shoulder this tremendous responsibility of ensuring the continuity of the moral and spiritual message finally entrusted to him.

The transformation that the Muslim society had undergone in consequence of its domination by Mu'āwiya and his clan and mercenary associates for two decades had eventually rendered it generally indifferent to the human equality, social justice and, compassion preached by the Prophet of Islam. Kingly authority and the hierarchy of arbitrary rights and privileges that necessarily accompany the establishment of such a socio-political system had made it impossible for the ordinary person to take a stand against it. Therefore, since he could not fight it with the hope of defeating it, he either became apathetic or joined the ranks of those who exercised authority and could tempt him with irresistible offers but, finally, meagre rewards. Such is human nature, and so hopeless was the human situation in that society that the hope of reward, no matter how meagre it was, always remained sufficiently effective to ensure submission. Evidently, this is what the poet al-Farazdaq referred to tersely when he informed the Imam Husayn on his way to Iraq that though the hearts of the people were with him, their swords were with the Umayyads.²⁹ But this did not deter the Imam

²⁸ 2: 62, 87, 285; 3: 3-4, 33-4, 38-9, 44-9; and many more.

²⁹ 'Abd al-Razaq al-Mūsavi al-Muqarram, p. 174.

Husayn from the great objective he had set before himself: the revival of the moral and spiritual values of Islam in that milieu.

The firmness of his determination to attain this objective even if it involved the ultimate self-sacrifice of martyrdom is evident from some of the last discourses he delivered before his death. Addressing the gathering that included the cavalymen under Hurr, he said:

O people, the Prophet has said that he who sees a tyrannical potentate transgressing against God and His Prophet and oppressing and wronging the people and remains apathetic and does nothing, neither by word nor by deed, to alter the situation, then it will be just on the part of God to place him where he deservedly belongs.

Your messages and letters reached me in regard to your allegiance to me stating that you will not forsake me, so if you have come to a final decision in this regard then you ought to follow the right path. But if you have broken your pledges . . . , and this is not unlike your previous behavior with my father and my brother and my cousin Muslim, [then remember that] you yourselves will be the cause of your misfortunes, and you yourselves will ruin your lot, for whoever breaks a pledge only harms himself, and God is not in need of anyone.³⁰

On arriving in Karbalā', he addressed his companions thus. First turning to them, he said 'the people have become the slaves of their worldly interests, while religion is merely a light favour on their tongues; they gather around it only so long as it yields abundant benefits to their livelihoods, but when they are put to the test as affliction strikes them, few remain to stand and judge.' Then he delivered a brief sermon:

You see what has befallen us; how the world has changed, and changed for the worse. Its good has receded and what little is left over is but the last trickle, and the scarcity of livelihood is like a sparse and unwholesome pasture! Do you not see that the truth is not put into practice and that falsehood has no limit. O how the faithful long for union with God! [As for me] I look upon death as but a felicity (of martyrdom) and I regard life amongst oppressors and transgressors as nothing but an agony and a torture.³¹

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194; also al-Ṭabarī, p.305.

In a situation such as this, the momentous decisions made by the Imam Husayn were significant in both their moral and historical consequences. Firstly, he refused to accept or to recognize the morality or the validity of the arbitrary royal authority imposed upon the people by an egotistic autocrat supported by the tribal and clannish group feeling of the Quraysh and their Umayyad leaders simply because it was repugnant to the will and the word of God as expressed in the Qur'ān and to the Prophet's moral and spiritual message of Islam. Second, he departed from Medina, and then from Mecca, in order to avoid their desecration through strife and bloodshed, and to preserve the sanctity of the former as a city of peace, and of the latter as the sanctuary of all living things. Third, he responded positively to the call for leadership from the oppressed people of Iraq against the tyrannical rulers of the day. Fourth, he was averse to making elaborate military preparations so as to let the popular uprising of the oppressed masses retain its popular Islamic character. Fifth, on learning how the imminent popular uprising had been cunningly outmanoeuvred by Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād and then brutally suppressed, he selflessly offered to depart beyond the limits of the Umayyad Empire. And finally, he was unshakably resolved to lay down his life rather than to swear the oath of allegiance to an usurper of the right of the people to opt for a ruler who fulfilled all the conditions required by Islam.

The night before the day of his martyrdom and the martyrdom of his companions and relatives, the Imam Husayn absolved every one of them from any obligation to die for him. He even asked them to escort the members of his own family and household away from Karbalā', since, he said, the tyrannical rulers of the day were eager only for his death in revenge for his not giving them the recognition they sought from him in view of his high spiritual status of being the Prophet's grandson and spiritual successor. But not any one of them left his side, and every one of them laid down his life, both for him, and for his great cause.

These were indeed momentous decisions that kept alive the faith in God and in the humane principles of Islam preached by the Prophet. Who can claim to be the greatest witness to this faith, except the Prophet's own grandson, who died as a martyr for its great cause?

THE MARTYRDOM OF IMAM ḤUSAYN AND THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF EARLY ISLAM

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THE martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn was not an isolated instance in the history of early Islam, but rather the expression of one significant trend of a much more widespread movement. The characteristics of this movement began to emerge after the first six years of the caliphate of 'Uthmān; widely-based, it was aimed against all forms of autocracy and of deviation from the original principles of Islam, principles which were rooted in the Medinan society of the time of the Prophet and of Abū Bakr and 'Umar.

Imam Ḥusayn thus presented an example of martyrdom in the cause of opposition against all forms of tyranny and injustice, and against deviation from the foundations for Islam laid down by the Prophet and followed by the first two caliphs and then 'Alī.

It is our opinion that it is not possible to arrive at an understanding of the example which he gave us without reference to the great changes in Islamic society during the caliphate of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. In our analysis here we shall concentrate first on the economic aspects of these changes, and then turn to the massive social and political consequences that they brought about.

In examining economic life during the time of the Prophet and the first four, 'rightly-guided', caliphs, one is struck by the desire of the nascent Islamic state in Medina to realize social justice for all

groups in Islamic society.¹ And this is hardly surprising, for the weak and the poor had hastened to support the new faith. The Byzantine emperor Heraclius asked Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb about the followers of the Prophet, saying: 'Tell me, then, about those among you who follow him. Who are they?' And Abū Sufyān replied: 'They are the poor and the weak, and young men and women; as for the noble and powerful, not one of those are his followers.'² The mass of the first Muslims, then, were from the poorer classes. The Prophet said to 'Adīy b. Ḥātim: 'You see that the Muslims are in need, and thus are prevented from entering this religion. But, by God, wealth is about to come to them in such great quantity that there shall be no one found to take the trouble to pick it up!'³

Thus we see that, from an economic point of view, the new faith came in opposition to all forms of extreme wealth—and this in spite of its respect at the same time for private property. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf reports from his father this exchange with the Messenger of God:

The Prophet said: 'O Ibn 'Awf, you are a rich man, and shall therefore not enter Paradise except creeping on the ground! Give then a loan to God so that he may free your legs and allow you to walk instead.' My father asked, 'And what shall I give as loan, O Messenger of God?' He replied: 'Begin with what you have acquired until now.' 'O Messenger of God,' exclaimed my father: 'all of it?' 'Yes', he answered. And my father left greatly concerned by the Prophet's words. The Messenger of God then sent for him, and told him: 'Gabriel has said: "Command Ibn 'Awf that he give hospitality to guests, feed the poor, and give to the beggar, and that he begin with those for whose support he is directly responsible. If he does that, then it shall count as purification (*tazkiya*) of the wealth he possesses."⁴

In addition, Islam made out of the *sadaqa* (freewill offering) an instrument for the distribution of wealth intended to approximate

¹ See A. D. Al-Ḥabīb al-Janḥānī, 'Economic Life in the Arabian Peninsula in the Time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs' (in Arabic), in *Abḥāth al-Nadwa al-'Ālamīya al-Thālitha li-Dirasāt Tārīkh al-Jazīra fī 'Amr al-Rasūl wa-al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn* (Faculty of Arts, Riyāḍ University, October 1983).

² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1960-69), II, 648.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 115.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Leyden, 1321/1903), III/1, 93.

true social justice as closely as possible. Yazīd b. Sharīk al-Fizārī was heard to say in answer to this question, 'In the time of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who did he used to send to the people [in order to gather *sadaqa*]?: 'It was Maslama b. Mukhallad; he used to take the *sadaqa* from the rich, and give it to the poor.'⁵

During times of trial and crisis the interests of the Muslim community always occupied first place. Thus in the year of the famine of Ramāda, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb considered housing the hungry and destitute who were coming in from the desert in dwellings better than those occupied by the people of Medina themselves. 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Umar reports from Nāfi' on the authority of Ibn 'Umar that 'Umar declared: 'If I cannot provide for these people sufficient wealth to relieve their situation except by housing in each dwelling the same number of people as already live there, and then giving them half the food of the inhabitants of that house to eat until God Himself provides relief for them, I will do it. [The Medinans] shall not perish for want of half their food!'⁶

When the first signs of imminent wealth began to appear after the beginning of the Islamic conquests, the 'rightly-guided' caliphs were disquieted, fearing that the growing gap between different social groups would lead to unrest and sedition. The following report is from 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf. He said:

I went one day to see Abū Bakr, the Veracious One, when he was ill with the sickness of which he eventually died, and I said to him, 'I see, O Caliph of the Prophet of God, that you are recovering!' He said: 'Not so, rather I am in extreme pain, but what I have undergone because of you, O Emigrants, is more difficult to bear than my pain. For I appointed the people I thought best for you to rule your affairs, but each of you insolently sought power for yourselves without taking into the account the one I had appointed. By God, you use brocade pillows and silken covers, and you consider reclining on fine wool to be like sleeping on a bed of sharp thorns! By He in whose Hand is my soul, if one of you were to have his head cut off unjustly, it would be still better for him than plunging into the murky affairs of this world! O you who are supposed to be yourself a guide to the way, you have lost the way. If you wait until dawn, you shall

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

see clearly, but if you journey without a guide, it will lead to misfortune!'⁷

In fact, the situation reached such a state toward the end of 'Umar's caliphate that he was moved to utter his famous words: 'Had I seen things then the way I see them now, I would have taken the excess wealth of the rich and divided it among the poor of the Emigrants!'⁸

The spreading frontiers of the young Islamic state after the beginning of the conquests and the emigration of the tribes to new settlements made necessary a rethinking of the administrative and fiscal structures regulating the affairs of the state and its subjects. Thus 'Umar set up the *dīwāns*: '... and he was the first to register people in Islam in registries; he registered them according to their tribes, and allocated for them a fixed payment (*atā'*).'⁹

This fiscal arrangement was a simple one, thus increasing caliphal control over affairs. In spite of its simplicity, however, it was precise in its operation, aimed at justice in the distribution of wealth. 'Umar declared: 'By God, if I remain alive, I shall ensure that even a shepherd shall receive his share from [the income from a place as far away as] Mount Ṣan'ā', while he remains in his place!'¹⁰ Salmān also reported that 'Umar said to him: 'Am I a king, or a caliph?', to which Salmān answered: 'If you take so much as a *dirham* from the land of the Muslims, or less or more, then use it other than it should be used, then you are a king rather than a caliph.' And upon hearing this, 'Umar wept.¹¹

It is financial policy which is the touchstone of the true nature of a political order. It is no wonder then that we find the two caliphs of the Prophet of God, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, paying great attention to financial policy and setting strict standards for the ways in which the community's wealth was to be spent. It was subsequent negligence in the application of these standards which

⁷ *Al-Kāmil lil-Mubarrad* (Cairo, n.d.), I, 6ff.; and Ṭabarī, III, 429ff.

⁸ Ṭabarī, IV, 204.

⁹ Ṭabarī, IV, 204. On the causes for the establishment of the *dīwāns* and on the distribution of the *'atā'*, see also *ibid.*, pp. 209ff., Ibn Sa'd, III/1, 202 and *passim*, 212ff., and al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wizarā' wa-al-Kuttāb* (Cairo, 1938), p. 16 and *passim*.

¹⁰ Ṭabarī, IV, 211.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 211.

became one of the main causes of resentment and unrest among the people, as we shall see in our examination of the caliphate of 'Uthmān.

In this respect I would like to first make the following points:

(a) 'Umar's emphasis on financial and economic policy in general was a part of his view of the 'wealth of God' as being that of the whole of the Muslim community. He once said: 'I consider myself in relation to the wealth of God as an orphan; if I myself am wealthy, then I refrain from it, but if I am poor, then I partake of it as is proper.'¹²

(b) 'Umar well understood the importance of the honesty of officials and the effect it has on the life of the community. He used to say: 'The people will themselves remain honest as long as their leaders are honest.'¹³ It was this honesty on the part of 'Umar which caused Abū 'Uthmān al-Nahdī to declare: 'By God, were my spear able to talk, it would have many things to speak of, and were 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb a balance, that balance would not be out the weight of hair!'¹⁴

(c) 'Umar imposed the financial policy which he applied to himself on his family and kinsfolk as well. We have already indicated that 'Umar had been compelled to borrow from the treasury—the *bayt al-māl*. The affair continually preoccupied him, and even in his death agony his mind would not rest until after he had his son 'Abd Allāh take responsibility for the debt.

The attempt made here to present some of the political-economic foundations of this period is aimed, on the one hand, at a discovery of the fixed principles of this policy, and, on the other, at an examination of the deep influence these principles exercised over the political and social events which Medina experienced, beginning, as we shall see, with the changes which took place under the caliphate of 'Uthmān.

Imam 'Alī tried to follow the same path as Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Towards the Quraysh, who after 'Umar's severity had experienced a period of laxity during the time of 'Uthmān, he was exacting, and

¹² Ibn Sa'd, III/1, 197.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

this brought about clear social and economic consequences. However, the change in the situation and the unrest attendant on it did not permit him to apply any economic policy that would have required political stability in order to bear fruit.

It is hardly surprising that Imam 'Alī tried to follow in the footsteps of 'Umar, for 'Alī was the purest of men and the closest to the policy applied by the Prophet, as well as being among the closest advisers to the two caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Once when 'Umar was taking counsel on what part of the treasury was lawful to him to spend on his family, he said: 'Once I was a merchant, and God provided for my family through my trade, but now you have employed me in your affairs. [Tell me, then,] if you consider any part of the treasury lawful to me.' People had many different opinions on the matter, but 'Alī remained silent.¹⁵ 'Umar, wishing to know 'Alī's opinion exactly, said: 'What do you say, O 'Alī?' 'Alī answered: 'Whatever is needed for your welfare, and that of your family as is befitting—none of this wealth is yours except that.' And those gathered said: 'The right opinion is that of Ibn Abī Ṭālib!'¹⁶

When Imam 'Alī died, his son Ḥasan gave his funeral oration in the mosque of Kūfa. He said: 'By God, he left nothing but seven or eight hundred (*dirhams*), and that he marked for his manservant!'¹⁷ And 'Alī also used to say: 'O wealth of this world, you may deceive others, but do not deceive me!'¹⁸

¹⁵ Tabarī, II, 616.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 616.

¹⁷ Tabarī, V, 157. See also Ibn Sa'd, III/1, 26.

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Bayān al-'Arabī, 1965), II, 712. The well-known story concerning 'Alī in which he is said to have noticed his daughter wearing a pearl from the treasury again points to the great care he took in spending the wealth of the Muslims. It is reported from 'Abbās b. Faḍl, a client of the Banū Hāshim, who reported it on the authority of his father, who reported it on the authority of his grandfather Ibn Abī Rāfi': '[My grandfather] was keeper of the treasury for 'Alī. One day he came by, when his daughter was adorned in finery, and he saw that she was wearing a pearl which he knew to be from the treasury. "Where did she get that from?", he said. "By God, I must now cut off her hand!" My grandfather saw that 'Alī was serious, and replied, "It is I, O Commander of the Faithful, who used it to adorn the daughter of my brother. And where would she have got it from if I had not given it to her?" 'Alī then fell silent.' (Tabarī, V, 156) As for Mu'āwiya, he was most eager to amass wealth by any means available to him. While he was on his deathbed and his two daughters were kissing him, he said to

This, then, was financial policy during the time of the Prophet, and these were the rules of conduct in relation to the affairs of the new Islamic community according to the principles laid down in the time of the Prophet. Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Alī were all very much intent on abiding by these rules and maintaining honesty in their application, considering any overstepping of them to be perversion. This was because they were very fundamental matters on the one hand, and because the texts concerning them were clear and their viability was confirmed by their application in the time of the Prophet, on the other.

What then, were the most prominent features—from the political and economic point of view—of the change away from this approach in the conduct of the affairs of the Islamic community?

First this point must be made: that in spite of its respect for private property and for legal business enterprise, Islam always strove to fix a limit on the exorbitant accumulation of wealth and to maintain the community in its unity by regulating factors likely to cause upheaval and unrest—foremost among these factors being the widening of the social gap between various groups. This approach is sharply and clearly evident in the time of the Prophet and of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Imam 'Alī strove as well to follow the same approach, in spite of the fact that his caliphate was cut short and in spite of the great number of political and military events which it experienced.

Against this background great social change was taking place. Abū Bakr, while on his deathbed, had already alluded to the characteristics of these changes. He had already given 'Umar his advice and, his thoughts turning to the matter of the caliphate, he turned to 'Uthmān and said: 'O 'Uthmān, if the people should recognize your [precedence in] age [i.e., if they should therefore make you caliph], then fear God, and do not make the people carry

them, 'You kiss one who was ever-changing and devious, and who amassed wealth by any means possible. Will not such a person enter the Fire?' Then he cited the following verses: 'I have done for you the best I could; I have spared you the trouble of running hither and thither [to acquire wealth].' Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakam also reported that he was told: 'When Mu'āwiya was on the point of death, he willed that half of his wealth be returned to the treasury, wishing'—Ibn Athīr writes 'it was as if he wished . . . '—'to make good the rest.' (See *ibid.*, p. 326 and *passim*.)

the weight of [your clan,] the Banū Abī Mu'ayy on their shoulders!' He then repeated the same advice to 'Alī, saying, 'If you should rule the Muslims, do not make the people carry the weight of the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib on their shoulders!'¹⁹

This is the caution which we find also in the policies followed by 'Umar in the settlement of the cities. When 'Umar gave permission for brick buildings to be raised in Kūfa after it had been burned down in the year 17, he said: 'Go ahead, then, and build. But let no one of you build any more than three houses, and do not make the buildings too high. Keep to the *sunna*, so that the empire will survive for you.'²⁰

It was not long, however, after the death of 'Umar that the situation and its politics changed. Sayf relates from Muḥammad and Talḥa that they said: 'Not a year of 'Uthmān's rule had passed when some men of Quraysh began to appropriate property in the cities and to deprive the people of them.'²¹ Sayf b. 'Uthmān b. Hakīm b. 'Abbād b. Hunayf related from his father: 'The first indecent act which took place in Medina was the flying of pigeons and shooting them down with bows [i.e., as a form of gambling].'²²

This was in the year 35 during the time of 'Uthmān, indicating clearly that signs of economic and social change had already found their way into Medina itself. In the year 30 of the *hijra* 'Uthmān himself gave warning to his family, saying: 'O people of Medina, be ready and be steadfast, for sedition is about to overwhelm you.'²³ However, even before sedition 'was about to overwhelm' Medina, its flames had already been kindled in the new settlements, the result of demographic developments and of a change in economic and social structures. Upon being appointed ruler of Kūfa in the year 30 of the *hijra*, Sa'id b. al-'Āṣ declared in his *khutba*: 'Sedition has reared its ugly head, and by God I shall beat it down until I manage to suppress it, or until it exhausts me!' He also wrote to 'Uthmān: 'The situation of the people of Kūfa has become unsettled. The nobles, the great families and the leading persons

¹⁹ Ibn Sa'd, III/1, 246, 249.

²⁰ Tabarī, IV, 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 398.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

among them are in defeat, while it is the upstarts who dominate the city. The tribesmen are rebellious to the point where they pay no heed to those of noble lineage; there is no greater affliction than that which has befallen Kūfa, nor will that affliction be lightened.²⁴

The new social groups which persisted in their opposition and which represented the mass of the people in Medina and the new settlements held fast to the principles laid down by the Prophet and consolidated by Abū Bakr and 'Umar after him. Foremost among these principles was that of equality among all Muslims and of cooperation. This was achieved through the application of *shūra* (consultation) in the taking of crucial decisions affecting the life of the community. These groups rejected the politics of favouritism and group politics arising from the clan and the tribe. Thus is it related from Sayf, who related it from Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa, that they said:

Those who have no claim to precedence cannot rise in council, in leadership or in favour to the same level as those who do have claim to such precedence. Such people used to refuse to accept the fact that others were preferred, and considered it cause for dispute. But all the while they concealed it, scarcely showing their true feelings at all, for they have no proof for their position, and the people are against them. However, if someone joined them, such as a new convert or a tribesman or a freedman, such persons would find their words pleasant. Thus their numbers

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 279. In regard to this it is also worth recalling that it was in the seventh year of 'Uthmān's rule that Sa'īd b. al-Āṣ arrived in Kūfa. He had been an orphan, brought up in the house of 'Uthmān, and was in fact the last of the family of al-Āṣ. The lower classes, and especially the slaves, did not approve of the dismissal of al-Walīd b. 'Uqba from office and the appointment of Sa'īd, for Walīd had "... treated the people kindly, even to the point where he began to divide shares among the maidservants and slaves. Both slaves and free men mourned his departure, and maidservants wearing mourning clothes could be heard to chant: 'Woe to us, for Walīd has been dismissed! and now Sa'īd has come to starve us. He gives short measure; he never gives more, and starves maidservants and slaves.' (*Ibid.*, p. 278.) This is the same Sa'īd who uttered the famous words: 'This Sawwād [that is the cultivated land of Iraq] is a garden for the Quraysh.' And Mālik al-Ashtar, who was one of those opposed to 'Uthmān's policies, retorted, 'Do you claim that the Sawwād, which God granted us through our swords, is a garden belonging to you and your kin? By God, He shall not increase your booty by a single share; rather your share shall be the same as that of any of us.' (*Ibid.*, p. 323.)

increased while the numbers of the other people decreased, until evil prevailed.²⁵

The central government was not able to maintain control of this demographic development and the political and economic problems which were its consequence. The problem reached critical proportions in Kūfa. It was as if Kūfa were dry wood set on fire; '... thus was the condition of the people of Kūfa, and gossip and rumour were rife'.²⁶

The difference between the policies which 'Umar applied in the organization of his rule and in the economic and social spheres—and especially in his great care in the matter of financial policy and his zealous guarding of the wealth of the masses—and between those of 'Uthmān, was enormous. 'Uthmān failed to heed the warning which 'Umar had given him, and he 'made the people carry the burden of the Banū Mu'ayt'.

In the year 27 of the *hijra* when 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'īd b. Abī Sharḥ, 'Uthmān's foster brother, was about to be sent to Africa, 'Uthmān said to him: 'If God, praised and exalted be He, gives you victory tomorrow over Africa, that which belongs to you from that which God grants the Muslims in booty is a fifth of the fifth of the booty which is taken in coin.' This behaviour stirred up the resentment of the army and brought protests from the Muslims. Ṭabarī gives a story from al-Wāqidī in which 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd concluded a peace with the people of Africa in return for three hundred *qintār* weights of gold. 'Uthmān then ordered that it be given to the family of al-Hakam.²⁷ In the year 35 of the *hijra* a number of camels from the *sadaqa* were given to 'Uthmān. He subsequently gave them as a gift to some members of the Banī al-Hakam. News of this came to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, who went out and divided them instead amongst the people. At the same time 'Uthmān was in his house and one of the inhabitants of Medina was threatening him with death, saying: 'By God, I will put these fetters around your neck if you do not let go these hangers-on of yours!'

Imam 'Alī was in the vanguard of those who criticized the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 253 and *passim*.

behaviour of 'Uthmān's hangers-on in relation to affairs of state and the wealth of the community, and he gave him advice on more than one occasion, all without result. 'Alī said: "'Uthmān refuses to accept the advice of anyone. He has chosen his allies from deceitful people, and there is not one of them but that he has usurped land, the revenues of which he devours and the inhabitants of which he humiliates."²⁸ Nor did 'Uthmān repudiate this financial policy which he had brought about, and which was a complete change from that of 'Umar. Rather he tried to justify it, saying: "'Umar used to withhold from his family and relatives out of desire for the face of God, and I give to my family and relatives out of desire for the face of God. . . ."²⁹ Thus 'Uthmān's relatives began to regard the institution of the caliphate, which had originally sprung from the principle of *shūra*, as their personal property. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam spoke to the people massed in front of 'Uthmān's house at the beginning of the siege, saying: 'You have come with the intention of depriving us of our property. Get away from us. . . ."³⁰

A great number of the Companions of the Prophet also were opposed to the radical changes which were taking place, especially in the area of finance, during the caliphate of 'Uthmān.³¹ The matter affected them to such an extent that in the year 34 of the *hijra* one group of people wrote to another that '... if you wish for *jihād*, then we have cause for *jihād*, for the people have rallied against 'Uthmān and they tell of him the ugliest things that anyone has ever been accused of, and the Companions of the Prophet of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, see and hear [what is taking place], but there is not one among them to deny these accusations or defend 'Uthmān, except an insignificant group. . . .'³² A number of other Companions, however, had themselves amassed indecent wealth through ownership of huge tracts of land, especially in the conquered territories after 'Uthmān violated the policies of 'Umar,³³ or through mercantile enterprise. It is

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 356ff, p. 406.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226, 345.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

³¹ One of the leading figures of this group was Abū Dharr al-Ghaffārī. See *ibid.*, pp. 283ff.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 336ff.

³³ Concerning this great change, see *ibid.*, pp. 280ff.

sufficient here to recall the wealth of some of the Companions in order to gauge the seriousness of the change in the economic field. Talḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh left behind two million and two hundred thousand *dirhams* and two hundred thousand *dīnārs* in capital assets, and his property in Iraq gave him one hundred thousand each year—excluding what he got from the Sarāt, a mountainous and fertile land between the Tihāma and the Yaman, and elsewhere. Al-Zubayr left property behind to a value of fifty-one or fifty-two million!³⁴ When Zayd b. Thābit (whom 'Uthmān had put in charge of the *dīwān* and the treasury) died, he left behind so much silver and gold that it had to be broken down with hammers, and this figure did not take into account property and landed estates, the value of which was one hundred thousand *dīnārs*. In addition he used to bring in the annual provisions for his family from a farm in Qanāt so large that it was irrigated by twenty streams. Yal'a b. Munabbih died and left behind five hundred thousand *dīnārs*, and debts owing to him, landed property and other bequests to a value of one hundred thousand *dīnārs*. Mas'ūdī adds to this information that 'There could be many more instances given and much more information on those who had great wealth at this time. But it was not so in the time of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, for then the way [to proceed] was clear.'³⁵

'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf bequeathed fifty thousand gold *dīnārs* in the way of God. He left an enormous legacy: he had one thousand camels and three thousand sheep, and he owned such a large area in the Jurf [in the Ḥijāz] that it required twenty streams to irrigate it. He left behind four wives, and the share of each one of them was between eighty to a hundred thousand. It is reported that 'Abd al-Raḥmān left such a quantity of gold that the hands of the workmen became blistered from the excessive labour required to break it down. And he was not alone in this, for others among the Companions of the Prophet and the leaders of the Quraysh were also in a similar position.'³⁶

³⁴ See Ibn Sa'd, IV/1, 76, 158; and al-Dūrī, *Muqaddima fī Tārīkh Saḍr al-Islām*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1961), p. 56.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁶ Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *al-Fiṭha al-Kubra* (Beirut, 1976), p. 743. Also in this connection see the account taken by Ibn Khaldūn from Mas'ūdī: *al-Muqaddima*, II, 712ff.

Among the greatest accusations which the opponents of 'Uthmān made against him was that he employed his relatives and family in positions of authority, and that he followed a corrupt financial policy.³⁷ Thus 'Ubayda b. Hilāl speaks many times of the faults of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān's policies. He says: 'Then he seized the booty of God, which God had granted to them [that is to all the Muslims] and divided it between the corrupt among the Quraysh and the wanton among the Arabs.'³⁸

Here I would like to make the following points:

(a) The new economic and social relations which Arab Islamic society faced played a basic and specific role in the consequences of this change in financial policy.

(b) It can be seen that the many problems encountered after the territorial spread of the young Islamic state and its domination in a very short time (not more than a quarter century) over areas of ancient civilization economically rich and varied in their population, as well as its control of an extensive network of routes crucial to the operation of world trade, all worked against any further development of the principles derived from the time of the Prophet which Abū Bakr and 'Umar had laid down with regard to economic and social organization. Thus, development, which might have been possible through a sharp transition to a central administrative structure capable of being put into operation, and which could have

³⁷ Balādhurī speaks also of the attitude the people had toward 'Uthmān. He writes: "'Uthmān lived and continued to be *amīr* for twelve years after he came to power. For six years the people had no complaint against him. The Quraysh in fact like him more than they had 'Umar, because 'Umar had been severe [against them], whereas 'Uthmān was quite lenient. In the six years following, however, he became careless in his relations with the Quraysh, overlooking them and putting his close relatives instead into positions of authority. He gave Marwān b. al-Ḥakam the *khums* from Africa, and in general gave much wealth to his relatives, [citing as justification] the injunctions which God has laid down concerning kindness to near relations. He took that money and also borrowed some money from the treasury, saying, "Part of this money is that which Abū Bakr and 'Umar left, and which belonged to them personally; thus I am taking it and giving it to my relatives." And for this he was strongly criticized." (Aḥmad b. Yahya al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb al-Ashrāf* [Jerusalem: 1936-], V[1971], 25, pp. 47ff). See also Ibn Sa'd, III/1, 44 and A. D. al-Ḥabīb al-Janhānī, *Dirāsāt Maghribīya* (Beirut, 1980), pp. 33ff.

³⁸ Tabarī, V, 565ff.

embodied the rapid change which the new community was experiencing, did not come about.

(c) We have put great emphasis on the first stirrings of the crisis which reached its zenith after the appointment of Yazīd as caliph over the Muslims. The martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn was an expression of a strong current of opposition within the young Islamic state, especially in the great settlements of Medina, Makka, Kūfa and Baṣra, against deviation from the principles of the Islamic faith and changes in the institution of the caliphate. The caliphate was a concept new to Islam, and its first pillar was scrupulousness in expenditure of the community's wealth. This is illustrated by the reply of Salmān al-Fārisī to 'Umar's question: 'Am I a king or a caliph?'³⁹

We believe that it is not possible to understand the depth of the experience which is exemplified in the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn and the numerous social upheavals which it led to except in relation to the series of other upheavals which began with the besieging of 'Uthmān in Medina, continued with the Battles of the Camel and of Ṣiffīn and the movement of the martyrs of Marj 'Adhrā', and then culminated in Karbalā' and the other social and political movements of similar significance which followed upon it. It would be naive to regard all these great events which the early Islamic community underwent as simply a struggle for power or a return to the old rivalry between the Banū Hāshim and the Banū Umayya. In our view the problem is much more profound than that. What the sources occasionally have to say about these tribal alliances and other such matters represent in our opinion only very secondary considerations in the face of the radical differences between two dominant social trends, the characteristics of which can be distinguished already during the caliphate of 'Uthmān.

The signs of the first main trend began to appear in the *wilāya* or administrative district of Syria in the time of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān. The caliph 'Umar noticed these signs when he arrived in Syria and Mu'āwiya met him in a splendour which would have befitted a king. 'Umar exclaimed: 'O Mu'āwiya, are you then a king, like the Persian Khosraw?' Mu'āwiya answered that the

³⁹ See above p. 167.

Syrians were used to seeing their rulers in such fashion, and that this was the only way to gain their respect. And despite 'Umar's lack of further comment on the matter, Mu'āwīya's answer was not satisfactory, for what 'Umar had observed was in fact the beginning of a transformation of the caliphate into a monarchy, as the events which followed were to confirm.⁴⁰

It is strange indeed to find Ibn Khaldūn attempting to justify Mu'āwīya's reply to 'Umar in spite of the historical events which are clear proof that by 'Umar's reference to the Persian monarchy he meant (in Ibn Khaldūn's own gloss) 'perpetration of wrong, tyranny, oppression, and disregard for God on the part of the kings of the Persians'.⁴¹ The signs of this type of monarchical rule become clear after Mu'āwīya's refusal to pledge allegiance to 'Alī and the Umayyad party's resort to arms in order to defend the advantages which they derived from the new king (as various sources confirm and as is supported by 'Umar's accusation against Mu'āwīya and the cunning and deception which Mu'āwīya used in replying to his accuser).⁴²

It is well known that Mu'āwīya was the first ruler in Islam to make use of guards and the first to have a government department or *dīwān* especially for seals. He never refrained from shamelessly enjoying worldly things or from glorying in being king. 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ada b. Hukma al-Fizārī reports:

⁴⁰ See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, the section on 'The Transformation of the Caliphate into Royal Authority', II, 708ff (English translation: Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 3 vols., 2nd rev. ed. [Princeton University Press, 1967], I, 414ff.)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 711.

⁴² Abū Muḥammad al-Umawī reported that: "Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb went to Syria, and there he saw Mu'āwīya coming to meet him with a great mounted escort. 'Umar said to him: "O Mu'āwīya, you come and go accompanied by such a retinue, and I have heard as well that each morning when you rise there are needy people at your door!" Mu'āwīya replied: "O Commander of the Faithful, we are surrounded by the enemy, and they have eyes to watch us, and spies. Thus I only wished, O Commander of the Faithful, that they see Islam to be powerful." 'Umar replied: "This is nothing but the deceit of a crafty man, the deception of a clever man!" To which Mu'āwīya replied: "O Commander of the Faithful, command me as you will, so that I may fulfill your command!" "Woe to you!" declared 'Umar. "I have never disputed with you concerning anything in which I was wont to find fault with you, but that I was left in the end not knowing whether to command or forbid you!"' (Tabarī, V, 331.)

Mu'āwiya was travelling from one district of Syria to another, and encamped at a certain spot. A place was prepared for him on the top of a hill overlooking the road. He gave me permission to enter his presence and I sat down with him. Processions of camels, beasts of burden, maidservants and horses passed by. He said to me: 'Ibn Mas'ada, may God have mercy upon the soul of Abū Bakr! Neither did he desire the world, nor did the world desire him. And as for 'Umar, the world desired him, but he did not desire it. As for 'Uthmān, he obtained some of the wealth of the world, but the world got the better of him. But as for us, we wallow in it!' Then it was as if he regretted what he had said, and he added: 'By God, it is God who has given us dominion!'⁴³

'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umayr also reported that: 'A man spoke coarsely to Mu'āwiya and then continued to speak more coarsely still. "Are you going to put up with this?", he was asked, and he replied: "I do not interfere between people and their tongues as long as they do not interfere between us and our rule!"'⁴⁴ Mu'āwiya was the first as well to have singing parties, and he spent a great deal of the Muslim community's money on singers, even when they were of doubtful morality.⁴⁵

These were some of the characteristics of the new Umayyad rule. And the goal of maintaining this rule and all the privileges which it conferred on the ruling family and their cohorts became the justification for any means, regardless of whether they were in direct contradiction to the principles of the Islamic faith and its values. While on his deathbed Mu'āwiya advised his son Yazīd, who was to be his heir, thus: 'And as for he who lies in wait for you like a lion and who is cunning against you like the fox, if the chance is given him he will pounce. That one is Ibn Zubayr. And, if he does pounce, then overpower him and cut him to pieces!'⁴⁶

The Islamic historical sources are full of information about the tyranny and oppression which the Umayyads used against all forms of opposition to their rule. Zuhayr b. Qayn in his speech to the people of Kūfa on the day of Karbalā' gives a description of the behaviour of the Umayyads:

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 322ff.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

We invite you to the cause of the victory of the progeny of Muḥammad and to abandon the tyranny of 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, for you shall experience nothing from these two [i.e., the caliph and his appointee] but evil all the days of their reign. They shall gouge out your eyes and cut off your arms and your legs. They shall mutilate you and they shall crucify you on the trunk of a palm-tree. They shall murder your best leaders and your Qur'ān readers, such as Ḥujr b. 'Adīy and his companions, and Hānī' b. 'Urwa and those like him.⁴⁷

These methods of the Umayyads began with political cunning and the falsification of testimony, then spread to buying supporters with money from the treasury.⁴⁸ And when the offer of money and high office did not avail, banishment, cruel death, mutilation, and burying alive were used to intimidate their opponents. In fact, the first head in Islam to be publicly exhibited was carried from Mawṣil to Mu'āwiya in Damascus.⁴⁹

Nevertheless opposition to the tyranny of Umayyad rule continued to grow and develop, taking on the form of social opposition dominated by leaders known for their piety and for their willingness to defend Islamic values and to be martyred for their sake. The movement, for instance, of Ḥujr b. Adīy b. Jabala al-Kindī and his companions—the martyrs of Marj 'Adhrā'⁵⁰—was not that of one person or of a small group of persons, but rather one manifestation of a widespread resentment which, in spite of the intimidation which the rulers in Damascus used in these cities, came to include all the great Islamic settlements, especially Medina, Baṣra and Kūfa. Finally the wave of anger engulfed even the partisans of the Umayyads and their relatives among the ranks of the notables of Kūfa. Ziyād acknowledged this when he attacked these notables. He said:

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the measures of oppression used by the Umayyads in the time of Mu'āwiya and his son Yazīd, see *ibid.*, pp. 356, 358, 479, and 562; and also the rich store of information to be found in the *maqātil* literature, for instance in Abu al-Faraj al-Ishfahānī's *Maqātil al-Jālibīyīn*.

⁴⁸ See Ṭabarī, V, 270, 272, 278, 478, 483, 495, and *passim*.

⁴⁹ This was the head of 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq. It is also said that 'Uthmān shot the head through nine times with some arrows he had with him. See *ibid.*, p. 265.

⁵⁰ For details of Ḥujr and his companions and their deaths in Marj 'Adhrā' near Damascus, see *ibid.*, pp. 253ff.

'O people of Kūfa! Do you then attack with one hand, and pretend to console with the other? Your bodies are with me, but your desires with Hujr, that foolish troublemaker! You are with me, and your brothers, your sons and your families are with Hujr! This, by God, is your deceitfulness and your faithlessness! By God, you shall show me that you are guiltless, or else I shall bring people against you who will straighten you and put you down!'

They then stood up before Ziyād and said: 'We take refuge in God, the Exalted, that we should have any say in the matter other than that we should obey you and the Commander of the Faithful, and anything else which we believe you would take pleasure in. If there is any way we can show our obedience to you and our opposition to Hujr, then order us to do it!'⁵¹

Umayyad oppression reached such proportions that it even affected the ranks of well-known persons who had very recently supported the Umayyads in their call for the blood of 'Uthmān and then in their violent conflict with 'Alī.⁵² It finally led to a policy of hunting down all opponents and stifling them in one way or another. The height of this policy was reached on the day of Karbalā'.

Here it is necessary to ask ourselves about the forces propping up the administration of the new empire in Damascus. It is difficult to define these forces exactly, and especially their position with regard to class and social status. However, certain indications which have come down in the extant sources allow us to state with some confidence that it was the social groups which had tied their political and economic fortunes to the new regime in Damascus which supported the trend led by Mu'āwiya and stood in opposition to that led by Imam 'Alī and then his son Ḥusayn. Sulaymān b. Ṣurad declared: 'The true murderers of Ḥusayn were the notables of Kūfa.'⁵³ The situation in Kūfa was accurately described by Mujammi' b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Ā'idhī, one of four men who came to Imam Ḥusayn. He was told: 'Tell me about the people behind you'—i.e., those he had left behind in Kūfa. Mujammi' answered: 'As for the nobles, their corruption has increased greatly and their

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 257ff.

⁵² Concerning 'Ā'isha's position regarding the killing of Hujr, see *ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

sacks are full. They can be bought, and their counsel is of no avail. They are as one man against you. As for the rest of the people, their hearts are with you, but their swords shall tomorrow be unsheathed against you.⁵⁴

I would venture here to suggest that the position of the nobles of Kūfa and of other politically and economically influential groups in the other cities did not rest on a conviction that the rule of Mu'āwiya or Yazīd was legal, but rather on the need to defend their own interests and privileged positions. One of the most striking examples of this can be seen in the person of 'Umar b. Sa'd, the leader of the Umayyad army on the day of Karbalā',⁵⁵ and especially in the exchange which took place between him and Imam Ḥusayn. Abū Mikhnāf takes his account from Abu Janāb who in turn relates it from Thubayt al-Ḥadramī, who himself witnessed Ḥusayn's murder. The account states that Ḥusayn faced 'Umar b. Sa'd and said: 'Come with me to Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, and let us dismiss our forces.' 'Umar answered: 'But then my house will be destroyed!' Ḥusayn said: 'I will rebuild it for you.' 'My lands will be taken!', said 'Umar. 'I will give you better land from my lands in the Ḥijāz', replied Ḥusayn. 'Umar, however, refused. Abū Mikhnāf adds: 'People talked much about this incident, and accounts of it were spread without them having heard or been aware of anything which had passed.'⁵⁶

When Zaynab, daughter of Fāṭima, said to 'Umar b. Sa'd: 'How could you bear that Abū 'Abd Allāh be murdered, while you look on!', his tears flowed over his cheeks and his beard.⁵⁷ This, however, did not prevent him from afterwards ordering ten of his horsemen to trample Imam Ḥusayn's corpse with their horses!⁵⁸

Thus Imam Ḥusayn represented the tendency which his father had led at Ṣiffīn, and he always remained loyal to it. That tendency represented the defence of the principles of the Islamic faith and opposition to all forms of deviation from them and all

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁵⁵ Concerning his position and the position of the notables of Kūfa concerning Ḥusayn, see *ibid.*, pp. 409ff.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 454ff.

developments which would transform the institution of the caliphate into one of monarchical rule. Imam Ḥusayn thus represented a guarantee against desecration of the sanctity of Islam, and for respect for the Quraysh and the Arabs in general.⁵⁹ After the murder of Imam Ḥusayn many Muslims feared that the sanctity of Islam would be desecrated, and that they would be disgraced. This is in fact what took place, for the two noble sanctuaries of Makka and Medīna were violated, and the Muslims were required not simply to confirm Yazīd in the caliphate by an oath of allegiance, but to pledge that they would be his slaves!⁶⁰

It is not surprising that we find in the ranks of the party represented by Imam Ḥusayn a large number of Islamic personalities known for their firm adherence to the principles of the new Islamic faith, their opposition to all forms of oppression and deviation, and their piety and devotion. Thus when Ziyād b. Sumayya tried to falsify Shurayḥ b. Hānī' al-Hārithī's testimony against Ḥujr b. 'Adīy, Shurayḥ himself wrote to Mu'āwiya:

In the name of God, the All-merciful, the Compassionate. To 'Abd Allāh Mu'āwiya, Commander of the Believers, from Shurayḥ b. Hānī'. I hear that Ziyād has sent you a testimony attributed to me against Ḥujr b. 'Adīy. But my testimony as to Ḥujr is this: that he is one of those who offers prayers, gives *zakāt*, performs the pilgrimage and the lesser pilgrimage, and enjoins to the right and dissuades from that which is reprehensible. Both his blood and his wealth are therefore unlawful. If you wish to, then kill him, or if you so wish it, then let him go.⁶¹

And these outstanding qualities were by no means rare among the partisans of Ḥusayn.

It is clear from what we have said that the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn came as the culmination of a series of armed revolutionary struggles which the supporters of the second main trend referred to above undertook. The representatives of this trend had made public

⁵⁹ See, for instance, the words of 'Abd Allāh b. Maṭī' to Ḥusayn upon meeting him on the road to Kūfa: *ibid.*, pp. 395ff.

⁶⁰ After Muslim b. 'Uqba entered Madīna he called the people to swear allegiance to Yazīd, swearing that they were 'the slaves of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, and that he could dispose of their property, their persons and their families as he willed' (*ibid.*, p. 495.)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

from the beginning their opposition to the corruption which had begun to appear since the second half of the caliphate of 'Uthmān and which became even greater in Damascus during the time of Mu'āwiya's rule and that of his son Yazīd. It was only natural, therefore, that Imam Ḥusayn should refuse to swear the oath of allegiance to Yazīd, despite being threatened with death.⁶²

The people in the cities, however, and especially those in Kūfa, did not refuse their allegiance to Yazīd and write instead to Imam Ḥusayn asking that he come so that they could swear allegiance to them only because he was a descendant of the Prophet and the son of Imam 'Alī. Rather they did so because he was first and foremost the leader of those in opposition to the Umayyad policies which the Shī'ī notables in Kūfa described to him in their letter. They wrote: 'Praise be to God who has crushed your stubborn and tyrannical enemy [i.e., Mu'āwiya], he who leapt upon this community, seized rule of its affairs and usurped its booty, then lorded over it without its consent, then murdered the best and spared the evil among them, and made the wealth of God a commodity changing hands among the rich and powerful! We have no *imām*. Come, therefore, that God may bring us together through you to the way of truth.'⁶³

In contrast to the Umayyad policies of which the letter of the people of Kūfa gave account, Ḥusayn described the duties of an *imām* in this way: 'By my life, an *imām* is nothing other than one who acts in accordance with the Book, who preserves justice and professes the truth, and who acts strictly in accordance with God's commands.'⁶⁴ He also wrote in his letter to the people of Baṣra: 'I call you to the Book of God and the *sunna* of his Prophet, for the *sunna* has been made to die and innovation (*bid'a*) made to live. If you listen to my words and obey my command, I shall guide you on the way of truth.'⁶⁵

'Abd Allāh b. Zubayr in his sermon to the people of Kūfa after

⁶² See *ibid.*, p. 338.

⁶³ Concerning the delegation of the people of Madīna, see *ibid.*, p. 480, the sermon of 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayr to the people of Makka after the murder of Ḥusayn, comparing him and Yazīd (*ibid.*, pp. 474ff.), and the exchange between 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād and Muslim b. 'Aqil: *ibid.*, p. 377.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

the murder of Husayn compared al-Husayn b. 'Alī and Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, the leaders of the two main trends to which we have referred. He said:

After what has happened to Husayn, should we trust these people [i.e., the Umayyads], believe what they say or accept their promises? No! We do not consider them worthy of that! By God, they killed him, although the hours in the night he had spent in prayer were long, and the days he had spent in fasting were many. He had more right than them to what they had, and he had precedence through both religion and virtue. By God, he never substituted singing for [recitation of] the Qur'ān, or vain chants in place of weeping for fear of God, nor partaking of forbidden drinks for fasting, nor riding about in search of prey [like Yazīd] for prayer sessions in remembrance of God. Perverse indeed are their ways!⁶⁶

The text which most clearly gives an account of the programme of the current of opposition headed by Imam Husayn is his sermon at Bayḍa. After praising God, Imam Husayn said:

O people, the Prophet of God said: 'Whoever sees a ruler practising oppression and usurpation and breaking the covenant of God, acting in opposition to the *sunna* of the Prophet of God and dealing with the servants of God through sin and transgression, but who does not try to change matters either through word or through deed—God then has the right to place him in the place he deserves [i.e., in the Fire]! These people are in the service of Satan and have left the service of the All-merciful. They have proclaimed iniquity, suspended the bounds (*hudūd*) laid down by God, and have taken the booty for themselves. They have made lawful what God made unlawful, and have made unlawful what He made lawful .

...⁶⁷

Husayn understood the equation of 'military power, and that he could not stand up to the might of the Umayyads which surrounded him at Karbalā'. Yet he rejected disgrace and submission to the power of tyranny, and he and his companions sought martyrdom instead in order to stand against oppression. Husayn rose at Dhū al-Husum, praised God, and declared:

The situation has become as you see it. The world has changed and taken on a false character, and decency has departed from it, so that nothing is

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

left of it but a meagre portion like the last few drops in the bottom of a vessel, and a livelihood like that of no more than a poor pasturage. Do you not see that truth is not heeded and falsehood not forbidden? Let the man of faith therefore seek to meet with God. I do not consider death anything less than martyrdom, and life with these oppressors anything but hardship.⁶⁸

It is not easy to comprehend the true meaning of Imam Ḥusayn's decision to expose the little band of his family members and followers to martyrdom in order to stand against an oppressive ruler.⁶⁹ Some see in him simply an example of idealism. Others see in Ḥusayn a lack of political sophistication or a case of misjudgement of political and military factors—a view which, however, would also have to assume compromise on his part and an acceptance of a kind of trading off the truth, which is precisely what the movement he represented had always rejected.⁷⁰

Imam Ḥusayn's decision was to face martyrdom in a battle for the defence of truth and of Islamic values in order to oppose oppression and tyranny and deviation from the straight way of a path laid out by noble ideals. He intended his martyrdom to be an eternal lesson in the conduct of human struggle against oppression and for the building of a society based on truth, freedom and social justice. When Imam Ḥusayn heard about the murder of Qays b. Mashar al-Ṣaydāwī, the messenger he had sent to the people of Kūfa, his eyes filled with tears he could not control himself. He recited the Qur'ānic verse: *Some of them have completed their covenant with God, while others await death still, not wavering in the least.* (33: 23)

The martyrdom of Ḥusayn was in fact an example for all forces struggling against oppression in all its various forms. It was not long before there were many uprisings against the Umayyad regime, examples of which are the uprising of Najda b. 'Āmir al-Ḥanafī b. al-Yamāma, that of the inhabitants of Medina in the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 403ff.

⁶⁹ See his words to his sister Zaynab: *ibid.*, pp. 420ff.

⁷⁰ In fact, Mughira b. Shu'ba had advised 'Alī i the first days of his rule to keep Zubayr, 'Alī and Ṭaha in their respective governorships in order to gain the allegiance of the people and of the army (Ṭabarī, IV, 438). 'Alī, not wishing to compromise the principles of Islam, refused.

year 63 of the *hijra*, then those of the people of Kūfa, and other such movements which took their model and example from Karbalā'.

Keeping alive the memory of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn goes far beyond exhortations about the need to repent a great sin—that repentance which was discussed by the notables of Kūfa in the house of the Shaykh of the Shī'i Sulaymān b. Ṣurad. Rather it is the keeping alive of the memory of a human experience which shall remain eternal and which must be an example for all Muslims whatever their persuasion. In fact Ḥusayn's martyrdom stands as an example for all peoples in their struggle against all forms of oppression and wrong and for the building of a society based on social justice.

In conclusion I would like to pose the following question: What can contemporary movements of Islamic revival learn from the heritage of rich historical experience which the movement exemplified by Imam Ḥusayn underwent?

In order to benefit from this experience it is important in my opinion to first immerse ourselves in the study of the history of Islamic society in all its forms throughout the ages. This must be a scientific and critical study, thorough and comprehensive, making use of the latest methods available to us in the human and social sciences. Such a study must be removed as far as possible from all traces of fanaticism and narrow-mindedness, and must not drift toward uncontrolled emotion or premature judgements. Such a study would permit us to understand the political, religious and social factors present in early Islamic society, and the great gap which that society experienced at many stages between theory and practice. What we mean here by the gap between theory and practice is the gap between clear Islamic principles and the world of reality, especially in the area of certain fundamental and crucial matters such as type of rule, freedom, and social justice.

Finally, it will be necessary to understand the historical experience we have spoken of here in light of the factors present in contemporary human society. This means that we must make use of these experiences in the struggle against oppression in the framework of a clear programme suitable to the political movements of mass consciousness which are struggling in the world today for democracy and social justice in Islamic society.

THE IMAM ḤUSAYN: HIS ROLE AS PARADIGM

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INTRODUCTION

THIS article seeks to summarize the rôle of the the Imam Ḥusayn as 'model' or alternatively as 'paradigm', a choice of terminology that I shall clarify below.

As is well known, the Shī'a integrate the *aḥādīth* or Sayings of the the Imams into the concept of *sunna*, together with the *aḥādīth* of the Prophet. Thus *al-ḥadīth al-nabawī* and *al-ḥadīth al-walawī* go hand in hand, both representing the indivisibility as well as continuity inherent in their concept of *sunna*.¹ This concept reflects two aspects: one that the conduct of the Prophet and the Imams exemplify an ideal, and secondly that such an ideal represents a paradigm according to which Muslims guide their own lives. If *tanzīl* or revelation can be said to represent the vertical dimension by which the Divine Will is revealed, then the Prophet and the the Imams represent through their model lives the unfolding at the horizontal level, that is to say in the world, of that Will. This particular dimension of the *sunna* embodies the enactment of a paradigmatic rôle rather than its juridicial complement where the concern is expressed in terms of conformity to a normative pattern as developed in the *sharī'a*.

¹ See for example Shaykh al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-Irshād*, trans. I. K. Howard (London, 1981), pp. 1-5, and al-Qādī al-Nu'mān's *Dā'īm al-Islām*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951), I, ch. 1.

Among certain Western scholars the analysis of the 'prophetic paradigm' has been focused essentially on the stages through which a 'prophet's' life may pass, and such phases, regarded as prototypical, have come to be applied to the lives of individuals as far apart in time and purpose as Zoroaster, the prophets of the Bible, the Prophet Muḥammad, Martin Luther, Joseph Smith, and many pretenders to the title in our time.² Such generalization and consequent superficialization can best be avoided by rooting the idea of *paradigm* in an Islamic context and defining it in terms of the concept of *sunna* that is found in the established sources on the lives of the Prophet and the Imams. The the Imams, as heirs, *awsiyā*, to the prophets, and as those who communicate the esoteric meaning and guard the exoteric aspects of the Divine Message, incorporate in their exemplary lives the *sunna* of all the prophets. This has come to have special significance in the case of the Imam Ḥusayn. As Professor Mahmud Ayoub has shown in his extensive study, each of the great prophetic figures, from Adam to Noah to Abraham and Jesus, participates at the level of Shī'ī sacred history in the suffering of the Imam Ḥusayn.³ Within the perspective of the Shī'ī tradition, the relationship between the Imam Ḥusayn and the ancient prophets is linked to the key events in their lives, which in turn depict a common pattern of participation and sharing in the tragedy at Karbalā'. In this way the paradigm reflected in the *sunna* of the prophets is projected into the life of the Imam Ḥusayn. At the esoteric level, this is a sacred conception of history in which each of the prophetic cycles has provided a *sunna*, a pattern of life as an example for those to whom the revelation is directed, and which has as its ultimate goal the creation of an ideal set of values for human kind. This process reaches its consummation in the Qur'ānic verse: *Today, I have perfected your dīn for you and called it Islam.* (5: 4)

² See for example the reference in M. R. Waldman, 'The Popular Appeal of the Prophetic Paradigm in West Africa', *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1982), 110. See also I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (London, 1971), for the background to such general notions of prophets.

³ Mahmud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978), pp. 27 ff. in particular. This paper has benefited greatly from Professor Ayoub's work. Where possible I have also drawn on the historical background from the work of Prof. S. H. M. Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London, 1979).

The the Imams, as an integral part of this sacred history, have a key rôle in the attainment of the ideal, and the specific participation of the ancient prophets, as well as the relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad, the other members of the Holy Family, and the Imam Ḥusayn, affirm the continuity of this paradigmatic rôle in their lives.

In reviewing the use of the term *paradigm* and rooting it within the conception of the *summa*, I hope the original sense of T. S. Kuhn's use of the term 'paradigm'⁴ has been clarified as representing the universally accepted set of presuppositions concerning the nature of the world with the implication that the world is to be perceived according to certain metaphysical assumptions.

As the Sayyid al-Shuhadā', the Imam Ḥusayn's life in Shī'ī tradition embodies in a vivid and dramatic manner the unfolding of the true sense of history and its significance for believers, and, as a mirror of the ideal present in the lives of the great prophets, he is seen as 'the living perfection or concretization of this ideal'.⁵

With this background in mind, we can focus on three different but inter-related contexts to illustrate the significance of this paradigmatic rôle: (i) the Paradigm of Leadership (*imāma*), (ii) the Paradigm of Polity (*umma*), (iii) the Paradigm of Moral Order (*dīn*).

It can be argued in each case that the Qur'ānic basis and prophetic example applicable to the respective context had undergone an erosion, and that the life of the Imam Ḥusayn seen through the traditional sources and symbolized by its repeated commemoration reflected a challenge to such erosion.

THE PARADIGM OF LEADERSHIP

Historians, and in particular modern Western historians of early Islamic history, who address the issue of leadership as it is reflected in biographical details on the life of the prophets and the the Imams, have tended to be sceptical about the value of such details.⁶ Though the general controversy between those who see leadership primarily as an individual attribute and those who prefer to view it

⁴ T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).

⁵ Ayoub, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁶ As a recent example see the remarks in M. A. Cook, *Muhammad* (London, 1983), pp. 61 ff.

as being determined by the situation still continues, it assumes a critical significance in the case of early Islam. The scepticism has often led to an over-emphasis on the historical situation to explain events and a subsequent minimization of the historic influence exerted by the individual examples of the prophets and the the Imams. In the case of the Imam Ḥusayn, this tendency has led to a virtual exclusion of most details and a discounting of the majority of traditions that depict the events in the life of the the Imam.⁷

As a result, much of the complexity and significance of the rôle of leadership exemplified by his life has been missed. The primary factor in this significance is the pattern of communication that came to exist between the individual life and the response of the group of followers who saw an intense, cosmic dimension unfolding in those events. As a paradigm in the context of Islam, the rôle of leadership of the Imam Ḥusayn represents a continuing pattern of communication as well as a learning process between the followers and the model. The testimony of Shi'ī tradition is the testimony of participants for whom 'history' and 'biography' are repeated and renewed, transcending the specific conditions that may have created it. The life of the Imam Ḥusayn thus understood as a paradigm of leadership becomes a model by embodying those qualities that, in all times and stages of human history, can be regarded as the true themes of the human quest for meaning.

The historical circumstances that precipitated the events of Karbalā' are too well known to be recounted here, but the specific actions of the Imam Ḥusayn in challenging the authority of Yazīd is explained by the traditional sources in its particular context. They point out the circumstances under which the *bay'a* or allegiance was demanded by Yazīd and rejected by the Imam Ḥusayn, where Islamic norms, which previously had at least been adhered to nominally, were now being discarded.⁸

In a sermon, preserved in Ṭabarī and delivered before reaching Karbalā', the Imam Ḥusayn sets out the basis for assuming the position of leadership and putting his life in jeopardy.

⁷ See for example the reference made by L. Vecchia Vaglieri regarding the scepticism of other historians in her article 'Husayn b. 'Alī', *E.I.*, III, 614.

⁸ See in this connection the remarks of Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i in *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. S. H. Nasr (New York, 1975), p. 200.

O people, the Messenger of God said during his life, 'He who sees an oppressive ruler violating the sanctions (*halāl*) of God, revoking the covenant of God, opposing the *sunna* of the Apostle of God . . . and does not show zeal against him in word or deed, God would surely cause him to enter his abode in the fire.'⁹

It is important to note that such a definition of *sunna* and the assumption of the responsibility of standing fast to it implies that the leadership of the prophets and the Imams draws its inspiration and strength from its awareness of a rôle envisaged for them by its very transcendent and cosmic origin. This rôle cannot be a merely passive one; it is dynamic, because linked to the transcendent, it imparts its example not just by word but also by deed.

THE PARADIGM OF POLITY: THE MODEL *UMMA*

The organization of the *umma* at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, as in other realms, was based on Islam's rejection of a dichotomous view of order. True sovereignty in the *umma*, which was the expression of the Divine Will through the revelation of the Qur'ān, rested ultimately with Allāh, and was effected through His messenger the Holy Prophet. Islam, in addressing the totality of life, thus included within its vision the realm of political life. According to the Shi'a, the continuity of this principle and paradigm lay in the acceptance of the divinely instituted leadership of the Imam 'Alī after the Prophet. For them, the issue of leadership was inseparably bound to the concept of *walāya* and the esoteric rôle of the the Imams in interpreting the Qur'ān and the *sunna*. As is well known, the position of the Imam 'Alī and his followers, in response to events leading to the establishment of the first three *khulafā' rashīdūn*, was to safeguard the well-being of the *umma*, while retaining the Shi'i perspective on the rôle of the the Imam.

The onset of the Umayyad dynasty, and particularly the nomination by Mu'āwiya of his son Yazīd to the position of ruler, altered the overall context quite dramatically. It is within this particular context that the rôle of the Imam Ḥusayn represents the affirmation of the paradigm of polity and of the model based on the perceived danger that the unity of members of the *umma*, as well as the very basis of its ethos, was being threatened by a

⁹ Ayoub, *op. cit.* p. 107, where this passage is quoted.

complete bifurcation. In relationship to the question of sovereignty, the historical events raised the question of whether the political life of Muslims was to draw its source of values from the paradigm of the *umma* established by the Prophet, or whether the operation of military power was to be permitted full sway. Whatever political and other causes are adduced for the eventual problems that beset Muslims during this period, our sources spend considerable time highlighting the Imam Husayn's resistance to the idea of the pursuit of power for its own sake. The affirmation that, in the organization of the *umma*, the principle of the sovereignty of Allāh should not be disestablished by the mere operation of power, constitutes a second paradigm established through the Imam Husayn's life.

THE PARADIGM OF MORAL ORDER

Related to the issue of sovereignty in the *umma* was the question of the moral order and of the values by which life in the *umma* would be governed. One significant aspect of the conflict that came to a head at Karbalā' as depicted in Shī'ī literature was between those who wished to maintain a totalizing Islamic vision, and those who based their behaviour on a frame of reference outside the Qur'ān and *sunna*, the Imam Husayn's message to those who wished to support his struggle as reflected in the letters he wrote, according to tradition, illuminate the nature of conflict:

For behold the *sunna* has been rendered dead and innovations are made alive. Thus if you listen to my words and obey my commands I shall guide you to the right path.¹⁰

In order to help define the elements in this conflict, I wish to borrow a contemporary term to identify how erosion of the *sunna* can be perceived. The term is 'secularity'. The process of secularization implies that there is no sacred centre, no defined and accepted authority originating from a Divine Mandate, and that mere historical actuality can determine what values predominate in life. This absence of faith and its primacy reflects the secularization of values. Our sources, when they refer to the events, make it evident that this was indeed the threat that the Imam Husayn perceived, as the *umma* was forced to come to terms and adapt to the given conditions of the time. The model that emerges from the

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 101.

nature of his response is that the source of values and identity, regardless of how grim the historical conditions may have been, cannot be made subject to the weight of circumstances; it must always remain constant.

The other element of 'secularity' that has some relevance for the situation at the time has to do with how the Imam Ḥusayn's very presence represented a threat. In as much as he symbolized the *sunna* and was the focus of those whose hopes and aspirations were based on the restoration of the primacy of Islam, his presence and rôle acted as a deterrent. For secularity to triumph, tradition, since it is regarded as static, must be broken through. On the other hand, as heir to the Prophetic Tradition, the Imam Ḥusayn's rôle was to safeguard and affirm the integrity of Tradition and to lend his prestige and authority to its defence. Secularization necessitates the disengagement of religious values and institutions from the sphere of public and political life. The events of Karbalā', in their own time and by their historic commemoration, were a resounding rejection of such a disjunction.

As I indicated earlier, the study of great figures also involves an analysis of the aspirations of those who respond to them and the continuing interaction between the 'model' and the followers. Thus, in examining the life of the Imam Ḥusayn, we are conscious of his own personal and moral example but also of its immediate and long-term social and historical impact. In this way we can hope to do justice to the life-long themes mirrored by his life, that have been absorbed into the consciousness of Muslims. These themes, which survive the historical moment and the limitations of time, represent a continuing source of inspiration in the universal search for transcendence.

THE ETERNAL MEANING OF THE IMAM ḤUSAYN'S MARTYRDOM

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THE purpose behind studying the historical events that led to the martyrdom of the Imam Ḥusayn in the year 61/680 is, primarily, to try to articulate intelligibly the humanly most significant questions which have since altered the context of routine human life in Islamic history. As such, what happened in that year cannot remain just private concern with the past, because the events at Karbalā', Iraq, were in some sense or other outstanding in the context of humankind generally, and not just in relation to the Prophet's family or their adherents. The day of 'Āshūrā' has proven to be an event with obvious religious and moral implications whose significance is universally perceived and whose religious and moral challenges cannot be ignored by anyone who claims to be a Muslim. The religious and moral deeds that took place on this day have remained unrepeatable ones that have an everlasting claim to our respect. After having known those deeds, the Muslim community can never remain indifferent to the Islamic challenges posed by the event of Karbalā': not because of the tragic nature of those deeds, but because those deeds cause spiritual and moral awareness and motivation in us and add to our understanding of who we are and of what we are committed to both as human beings and Muslims. Furthermore, the events at Karbalā' generate in us a sense of what is worthy of our wonder and our tears.

Hence the study of the events at Karbalā' ought to revive in us the great commitment and loyalty that we, as Muslims, have borne towards the Islamic revelation—the commitment and loyalty which were made explicit by the events on the day of 'Āshūrā', when the male and female, the old and young members and supporters of the Prophet's family demonstrated the excellence of their human endeavor. In the final analysis, it is the relevance of Karbalā' to humanity which continues to challenge our conceptions of standards of human respect and recognition for as long as there remain conscientious beings on earth.

However, the Imam Husayn's struggle to uphold the spiritual and moral values of Islam becomes comprehensible when seen in the light of the entire struggle of Abrahamic traditions to assert the oneness of God (*tawhīd*). In other words, the assertion of monotheism which is pre-eminently attributed to Abraham in the Qur'ān (12: 37-40), calls for the act of submitting to God (*islām*), which means accepting a spiritual and moral responsibility to uphold the standards of action held to have God's authority. Hence, accepting Islam and its challenge meant that Muslims opened themselves to vast new considerations of what life might mean when a person 'submits' to God. So construed, their act of 'submission' could be defined as commitment to the Abrahamic faith enunciated by the Prophet, Muḥammad, which required to establish an intensely creative person as committed to the social and juridical consequences of being a Muslim. Consequently, adherence to Islam presented an opportunity to build a new order of social life such as the Islamic vision had more and more obviously demanded. The 'submission' to God demanded, in the first place, a personal devotion to spiritual and moral purity; but, personal piety and purity implied a just social behaviour. Sooner or later, this challenge of Abrahamic faith was bound to require the creation of a just social order as the natural outgrowth and context of the personal piety and purity (*taqwā*) it required, because Islam is never satisfied with mere exposition of its ideals, but constantly seeks the means to implement them. Obviously, when no Muslim could have remained neutral to this challenge of Islam, how could the Imam Husayn have tolerated a movement spearheaded by the Umayyads which attacked the ideals and principles of Islamic

social order and suggested an alternative sort of sanction for their behaviour and especially for social leadership.

It is therefore pertinent to understand the Imam Ḥusayn's revolution within the historical context created by the individual's relationship to God and maintained by the aspirations for the creation of just public order prevalent in the Muslim community as a whole and given form in their corporate life. By regarding the events of Karbalā' as subordinate, some Muslim scholars, and following them, some Westerners, have tried to reduce the exceptional significance of the struggle of the Imam Ḥusayn and its impact upon the course of subsequent Islamic history. Undoubtedly, without full reference to the general socio-political milieu which developed following the death of the Prophet in the year 632, and which culminated in the events of Karbalā', the day of 'Āshūrā' appears to be a mere tragedy without any meaning and significance for posterity. The Imam Ḥusayn's revolution cannot be isolated from the general historical context of the Islamic challenge within which the Imam and his followers acted to make the purpose of the revolution explicit. In other words, it is impossible to appreciate the purpose behind the Imam Ḥusayn's, and his followers' martyrdoms without first understanding the historical circumstances that called upon him to defend the spiritual and moral heritage of Islam.

This is indeed a difficult task, because it is usually considered an impossible undertaking to separate two consecutive events in the history of human society. The explanation of this difficulty lies in the gradual nature of change of factors that demarcate one historical period from another. Moreover, it is even more difficult to demarcate the end of one period of a society and the beginning of another when two consecutive periods are required to be examined in order to determine the subsequent changes. It is this difficulty adumbrated in sensitive consequences to one's cherished notions about a particular period in Islamic history, especially the early days following the death of the Prophet, which has caused Muslim scholars in general to deviate from the responsibility of preserving their scholarly integrity in treating the history of the Imam Ḥusayn. Thus the imperative need to properly demarcate the period when the Muslim community began to witness their leaders' obvious deviation from the fundamental teachings of Islam, in order

to fully discuss the Imam Ḥusayn's response, has been ignored by many Muslim historians. It is only through objective evaluation of the early period of Islamic history that it becomes possible to understand the stance the Imam Ḥusayn took in the year 60–61/679–80. However, for a number of Muslim historians, who have generally failed to point out the obvious deviations from the Islamic revelation in the period that followed the Prophet's death, the challenge lies in revising their tendentious historical presentation of that early period, which has been slow in coming forth.¹ Nevertheless, a consensus among all historians belonging to various schools of Muslim thought has emerged that it is possible, at least, to fix the period of these deviations from Islamic norms, if not earlier, then, from the beginning of the second half of the period of 'Uthmān's caliphate (644–656 AD).

'Uthmān's caliphate typifies a period that caused general political and religious patterns to drift away from the standards that were provided by Islam. Indeed, it became apparent that the new currents in the Muslim community around this period which went towards creating new forms in the realm of public order were the result of these currents interacting with the mentality of the group that held power in the society, namely, the Umayyads, who had very little concern for the ideals of Islam. As a result, it is not sufficient merely to discuss these new forms at that time by limiting ourselves to the evaluation of the external forms only; rather, it is necessary to embark upon a serious discussion of the factors that

¹ Among modern scholars, the works of Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn, *al-Fitna al-kubrā* and *'Alī wa banuh*; and 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *Abū al-shuhadā' Ḥusayn b. 'Alī* mark a beginning in this direction of critical evaluation of early Islamic history. The important phase of 'revisionism' is also marked by Abū al-'Alā' Mawdūdī's controversial (as far as Sunni Muslims are concerned) *Khilāfat va mulūkiyyat*. This work has been refuted again and again by several Sunni authors who do not agree with Mawdūdī's objectivity in dealing with both 'Uthmān and Mu'āwiyā's caliphate. See, for instance: Muḥammad Ishāq, *Izhār-i ḥaqīqat bi javāb-i khilāfat va mulūkiyyat*, and Maḥmūd Aḥmad 'Abbāsī, *Ḥaqīqat-i khilāfat va mulūkiyyat*. Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London, 1982), p. 181–194, reviews modern literature written on the Imam Ḥusayn by Arab and Persian scholars. Unfortunately, Enayat did not read Urdu, and was unable to take into account an important and rather controversial study by the learned scholar 'Alī Naqī Naqavī, *Shahīd-i insāniyat* (1942), which precedes the Persian study of Ni'mat Allāh Sālihi Najafābādī, *Shahīd-i jāvid* (1968), based on historical method.

created these forms and the way they affected the society and the personages who moulded the history of this period. Such inquiry remains legitimate public concern, which puts the event of 'Āshūrā' in its proper perspective. The main question, then, that we intend to treat in this paper is: What had happened to Islam during this period that the Imam Husayn felt it necessary to take upon himself to undo the harm the Umayyads were causing to it?

Islam conceives of human nature in terms of both its spiritual and physical needs, and as such it is never content with mere exposition of its ideals, but constantly seeks the means to implement them. The Qur'ān gave Muslims every reason to wish for a government and a society which would be based on the 'noble paradigm' set by the political and the ideal sides of the Prophet's mission on earth. However, major political undertakings of the early Muslim leaders inevitably demonstrated a lack of commitment to the 'noble paradigm'. Since 'Uthmān's time the ruling class had used Islam more or less as a badge of identity. Whereas Islamic ideals carried a responsible and egalitarian social commitment, these rulers were engaged in creating a privileged class of a small elite tied together by common Arab heritage. The implications of such a deviation from the Islamic ideal became discernable to those Muslims who were most serious about the moral and political responsibilities which an acceptance of the Islamic faith entailed. The most obvious implication of reference to the Arabic heritage in ordering public and private life meant that Islam became the envied badge of a favored ruling class of Arabs who happened to be bound together by Islam. As such, that would have made Islam an Ishmaelism (as the Arabs were the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham), analogous to the Israelism of the Jews, in which converts could enter as members of the community only on the basis of their having descended from Abraham. Despite the comprehensiveness of the Islamic ideal and its universalistic direction, the exalting of the Arabs as being of the line of Ishmael and producing an ethnically-bound community became part of the political program of the Umayyads from the second half of 'Uthmān's caliphate. The most important consequence of this political mission, which gradually became clearer, was that Muslims were not treated on an equal basis as prescribed by the

Qur'ānic dictum regarding the 'brotherhood of all believers', and the Prophet's recommendation to the Muslims to renounce all conflict based on genealogy.² On the contrary, the great families of Medina who descended from the Prophet's close associates were accorded 'social priority' (*tafḍīl*), and the sense of the inviolability of the Arab tribesmen was reinforced against the Qur'ānic requirement that a Muslim, regardless of his ethnic affiliation, had to be accorded that personal liberty and dignity.³

Consistent with this anti-egalitarian attitude of the early Muslim leaders was the development of elaborate forms of urban luxury and social distinction. The fruits of conquest, in the form of the booty and the revenue from the conquered lands, had created an unequal distribution of wealth among all Arab Muslims. Consequently, the wealth was concentrated among the conquering families, affording them privileges based on arbitrary distinctions of rank. According to al-Dhahabī, during 'Uthmān's reign there was so much wealth in Medina that a horse would sell for one-hundred thousand dirhams, while a garden would fetch four-hundred thousand. The Umayyads, says al-Dhahabī, had, during this period, acted indiscriminately in amassing wealth to the extent that they had discredited the caliphate as the guarantor of the equality of all Muslims in sharing the wealth acquired through the spoils and the taxes from the conquered lands.⁴ Mu'āwiya, who

² See the Prophet's widely-quoted speech on the occasion of his Farewell Pilgrimage in Ibn Hishām, *Sirāt al-Nabī*, p. 821; and Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 123.

³ I have pointed out above that the seeds of this discrimination were sown earlier than 'Uthmān's period. See, for instance, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, VIII, 11, where the author relates the principle of 'social priority'—*al-tafḍīl*—introduced by 'Umar in the year 20/640, when he distributed the pensions on the basis of 'priority'. Thus, even the *muhājirūn* were classified into Quraish and non-Quraish immigrants; whereas all *muhājirūn* had priority over all the *ansār*, and all the Arabs were given priority over the non-Arab (*al-'ajam*), and so on. Apparently, during the last years of his rule, 'Umar came to realize the errors of his social and political policies, and retracted their implementation. This is evident in his reproach to one of his governors in the year 23/643 for having adopted class stratification and the etiquettes of the aristocrats in his gatherings. See Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, IV, 25.

⁴ Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, IV, 125f. The problem of the amassing of wealth and the unfair distribution of the fruits of conquest goes back to an earlier period when, according to Ṭabarī, the Arab leaders changed their simple ways by settling

symbolizes the prevailing tendencies of the Arab aristocracy in the first century of Islam, clearly formed his policies as the Arab chief, concerned perhaps less with the directives of the Qur'ān or the Prophetic 'pattern of moral behaviour'—the *sunna*. It can be maintained with much documentation that the Umayyad rulers did the minimum for the consolidation of Islamic matters. The Umayyad rulers and their governors—who were by and large neither pious nor committed to Islam—were not the people to promote a religious and social life corresponding to the *sunna* of the Prophet. As a matter of fact, reference to the *sunna* was not necessarily a reference to the *sunna* of the Prophet; rather, Mu'āwiya made frequent references to the *sunna* of 'Umar in setting the fiscal policies of the state.⁵ There was little concern about the religious life of the population. As true Arabs, they paid little attention to religion, either in their own conduct or in that of their subjects. If a man was observant of his religious obligation and was seen to be devoutly worshiping in the mosque, it was assumed that he was not a follower of the Umayyad dynasty, but an ardent supporter of 'Alī.⁶

Individual examples cited by several authoritative traditionists indicate the state of affairs in regard to the ignorance prevailing among the Umayyads about the ritual performances and religious precepts in the first century. In Syria, where the Umayyads had the staunchest support, it was not generally known that there were only five canonical daily prayers, and in order to make certain of this fact, it was decided that an associate of the Prophet who was still alive should be asked about it.⁷ It is impossible to fully

down in the centres of wealth-concentration in Syria. When 'Umar visited Mu'āwiya in Syria, he was shocked to see the way Mu'āwiya demonstrated his wealth to the caliph every time he came to see him (*Ta'rikh*, VI, 184.)

⁵ Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 264

⁶ Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 249

⁷ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunān*, I, 142; Nasā'ī, *Sunān*, I, 42; Dārimī, *Sunān*, p. 195. The general ignorance of the Muslims about religious matters is further attested by the account which shows that when 'Uṭba b. al-Naḥḥās al-'Ijlī cited a line of a poem by 'Adī b. Zayd, and attributed it to God in his sermon, people thought that it actually was from the Qur'ān, until he was challenged by Hishām b. al-Kalbī. See Ibn Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 91. In the *Sunān* of Nasā'ī, p. 46-7, here are traditions which indicate that up to the time of al-Hajjāj and 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, people had no

comprehend the state of affairs that prevailed under the Umayyads when the rulers of the people who lived under them showed very little concern for the understanding of the laws and rules of Islam. Indeed, such a period was alluded to in the Prophetic tradition which predicted the critical religious future of the Muslim community:

There will come rulers after me who will destroy the canonical prayers (*ṣalāt*) but continue to perform the prayers at the fixed times all the same.⁸

Moreover, the Umayyad hatred of the Hashemites, especially the Prophet's family, which was evident under Mu'āwiya and his successors, gave rise to controversies among Muslims on issues of Islam, whether political or doctrinal. The Umayyad spirit of fabrication, dissemination, and suppression of Prophetic traditions is evident in the instruction which Mu'āwiya gave to his governor al-Mughīra on defaming 'Alī and his companions:

Do not tire of abusing and insulting 'Alī and calling for God's mercifulness for 'Uthmān, defaming the companions of 'Alī, removing them, and refusing to listen to them; praising, in contrast, the clan of 'Uthmān, drawing them near to you, and listening to them.⁹

This instruction is in the form of official encouragement to fabricate lies directed against 'Alī and to hold back and suppress those reports that favoured him. Evidently the Umayyads and their political followers had no scruples in promoting tendentious lies in the form of Prophetic traditions, and they were prepared to cover such falsifications with their undoubted authority.

One such pious authority was al-Zuhrī, who could not resist pressure from the governing authorities, and was willing to promote the interests of the Umayyad dynasty by religious means. Al-Zuhrī belonged to the circle of those Muslims who believed that a *modus vivendi* with the Umayyad government was desirable. However, even he could not cover up the report that Anas b. Mālik had related regarding the critical religious situation under the Umayyads. The report is preserved in al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in a section entitled: 'Not offering the prayer at its stated time':

idea of the proper times for prayer, and the most pious Muslims were unsure of quite elementary rules.

⁸ Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, I, 37

⁹ Tabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, II, 112

Al-Zuhrī relates that he visited Anas b. Mālik at Damascus and found him weeping, and asked him the reason for his weeping. He replied 'I do not know anything which I used to know during the lifetime of the Messenger of God. [Everything is lost] except this prayer (*ṣalāt*) which [too] is being lost [that is, not being offered as it should be].'¹⁰

That the manner in which this well-established Prophetic practice of prayer had been altered, either out of ignorance or due to the anti-*sunna* and anti-'Alī attitude of the Umayyads, is further demonstrated by another tradition in al-Bukhārī, in the section entitled: 'To end the *takbīr* [the saying of 'God is greater'] on prostrating.' The tradition is narrated on the authority of Muṭarrif b. 'Abd Allāh, who said:

'Imran b. Husayn and I offered the prayer behind 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib [in Basra]. When 'Alī prostrated, he said the *takbīr*; when he raised his head he said the *takbīr* and when he stood up for the third unit (*rak'ā*) he said the *takbīr*. On the completion of the prayer 'Imran took my hand and said: 'He [Alī] made me remember the prayer of Muḥammad, peace be upon him.' Or, he said [something to the effect that] 'He led us in a prayer like that of Muḥammad, peace be upon him.'¹¹

The above facts show sufficiently the prevailing trend in the Umayyad state, where Islam was above all a badge of united Arab aristocracy, the code and discipline of a conquering elite. As became apparent in subsequent periods, the traditions of Arab aristocracy had relatively little inherent connection with Islam itself. In fact, under the Umayyads a responsible and egalitarian spirit of Islam was ignored in favor of power politics. Under such circumstances, the faithful had to deal with a crucial moral and religious question: To what extent could the Muslims consent to obey the rulers, who were completely opposed to the basic teachings of Islam?

It is possible to surmise from various sources on this period of Islamic history that the Umayyads presented a dilemma for the committed Muslims as to how they were to order their religious life under such rulers. Of course, there were some, like al-Zuhrī, who did not consider the deviation from the religious obligations by the Umayyads a sufficient reason to refuse obedience to them and

¹⁰ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 301f, *ḥadīth* no. 507. For al-Zuhrī's relationship with the Umayyads see: Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, II, 130.

¹¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 417f, *ḥadīth* no. 753.

declare them as unjust. These were the Marja'ites, who believed that to acknowledge the Umayyads as true believers it was sufficient that they professed Islam outwardly, and that it was not necessary to pry into their un-Islamic behaviour. Accordingly, these people did not raise any objection to the cruel measures adopted by the Umayyads and their governors against those pious individuals, like Hujr b. 'Adī and later on, the Imam Ḥusayn, who refused them their allegiance on the basis of their conviction that as an essential consequence of their religious responsibility they could not do so. On the contrary, the Marja'ites even defended the massacre which the Umayyads caused among their most pious opponents on the grounds that these individuals were disrupting the unity of the community by challenging the authority that represented the Muslim community as a whole.¹²

There were others among the pious persons, who, although acknowledging the unworthiness of the Umayyads to rule the community on religious grounds, maintained that the *de facto* rule of the Umayyads was in the interest of the state and of Islamic unity.¹³ They thereby contributed towards the acceptance of the rulers, and the people, following their lead, tolerated and paid allegiance to the un-Islamic regime. Furthermore, the accommodating outlook of this group laid the groundwork for the acceptance of any claim to legitimacy by a Muslim authority that managed to successfully seize power through upheaval or revolution.

On the other hand, we have persons like the Imam Ḥusayn, who refused to acknowledge these corrupt leaders and their representatives at all, and met them with resistance. As such, the Imam Ḥusayn and his followers provide a clear contrast to accommodation to Umayyad policies. The Imam Ḥusayn's unbending religious attitude stems from his conviction about the political responsibilities which an acceptance of Islamic revelation entailed.

¹² It is interesting to note that many early jurists belonged to the Murji'ite party, and were willing to be used as tools by the Umayyads. Abū Ḥanīfa, for example, was asked whether or not a wicked person could become the leader of the Muslim community; he is reported to have replied affirmatively, although some of the followers of the Hanafī school, understandably, in the later period, have denied this ascription to him. See Aḥmad b. 'Umar al-Shaybānī, *Adab al-Qāḍī*, p. 26f.

¹³ Ibn Ṭīqīqā', *Ta'riḫ al-Fakhrī*, p. 41f. Many relevant traditions can be seen in Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, II, 191, 15; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, I, 252.

In his letter to the people of Kūfa, who had urged him to come to Iraq to assume the responsibilities of an *imām*, he reaffirms his penetrating awareness of the religio-political responsibilities of the *imām*. He says:

I solemnly declare that a person is not the *imām* if he does not act in accordance with the Book [of God], and does not follow justice [in dealing with the people], and is not subject to the Truth, and does not devote himself entirely to God.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, one can discern the implication of the above statement in the Imam Husayn's declaration, made in a speech to the army of Hurr, who had come to intercept him on his way to Iraq. This declaration shows the disgust of the pious with the life lived under the ungodly Umayyads:

Do you not see that truth is not followed anymore, and that falsehood is not being interdicted [by anyone]? Indeed, it is within the rights of a believer to desire to meet God. Verily, I do not see death except [in the form of] martyrdom; and I do not see life with the unjust as anything but loathsome.¹⁵

It is evident that the Imam Husayn was reacting to the general condition of deterioration in the upholding of the Islamic teaching brought about by the anti-religious Umayyads and the prevailing outlook of accommodation among the Muslims encouraged by those theologians who supported the existing order and wanted to prevent civil strife at the expense of the Qur'ānic principle of justice. Thus, the events of the year 61/680 become comprehensible when seen in light of the Qur'ānic insistence on the establishment of a just social order under the guidance provided by God in the form of the Book and the 'noble paradigm' of the Prophet, and the manner in which the representatives of the Muslim community deviated from this goal following the death of the Prophet. Moreover, it was the commitment to the ideals of Islam that finally decided the course adopted by the Imam Husayn and his followers in Karbalā' on the day of 'Āshūrā'—a day which continues and will continue to challenge our conceptions of standards of human respect and recognition for as long as there remains a conscientious being on earth.

¹⁴ Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, V, 353.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, V, 404.

It is, I believe, the message of Truth and Justice—the Islamic revelation in its entirety—that makes the study and the commemoration of the Imam Ḥusayn's martyrdom deserving of our wonder and our tears. In Islamic history there is no other occasion which can generate the total responsibility that a Muslim has towards God and his fellow men. Furthermore, there is no other 'paradigm' that equals the paradigm provided by all the members of the Prophet's family in creating an egalitarian social commitment, which Islam obviously demands from its adherents. It is this paradigmatic nature of the Imam Ḥusayn's life that gives it an eternal meaning, promised in the Qur'ān, to all those who struggle and sacrifice their lives in the cause of God: *Count not those who are slain in God's way as dead, but rather as living with their Lord, by Him provided.* (3: 169)

III

RITUAL CONTINUITIES



POPULAR SHĪ'Ī MOURNING RITUALS¹

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THE tragedy of Karbalā' is viewed by the Shī'a as the greatest suffering and redemptive act in history. Actually it transcends history into metahistory, having acquired cosmic proportions. This places the passion of the Imam Ḥusayn at Karbalā' at a time which is no time and in a space which is no space. In other words, what happened in the year 61 of the Moslem era (680 AD), on the battle field of Karbalā' is as if it were taking place now, in the present, in any place where the Shī'a live, and especially wherever they are humiliated, deprived, and abused.

The timeless quality of this tragedy allows the Shī'ī communities to measure themselves against the principle and the paradigm of Ḥusayn. They strive to fight against any injustice, tyranny and oppression today. By so doing they hope to be considered worthy of the sacrifice of the 'Prince of the Martyrs'—Ḥusayn.

The commemoration of the Imam Ḥusayn's passion and martyrdom is charged with unusual emotions throughout the Shī'ī communities in the world. The belief that participation in the annual observance of his suffering and death will be an aid to salvation on the Day of Judgement is an additional motive to engage in the many mourning rituals. In the words of the Nobel prize winner, Elias Canetti, the suffering of Ḥusayn and its

¹ Thanks must be given to Dr B. Warburg for her assistance in the preparation of this chapter.

commemoration 'became the very core of the Shī'ī faith . . .', which is 'a religion of lament more concentrated and more extreme than any to be found elsewhere. . . . No faith has ever laid greater emphasis on lament. It is the highest religious duty, and many times more meritorious than any other good work.'² So it is not surprising that during the last thirteen hundred years the historical truth has been embellished by myth and legend, especially at the level of popular and emotional expression.

The mourning rituals have developed and are still increasing in various Shī'ī communities, and although they may differ in form, the passionate participation is universal. Some of them may even be considered as unlawful or inappropriate by the 'ulamā'. Even though some are frowned upon by rigorous theologians, they are nevertheless a true expression of popular beliefs and sincere devotion.

MOURNING RITUALS AND THEIR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The mourning rituals, divided into ambulatory or stationary ones, have been performed in the open for centuries, be it in the main artery of a town, on a village common, at a major intersection in the bazaar, in the courtyard of a mosque, of a caravanserai, or of a private house. In order to protect the participants from the weather an awning is sometimes spanned, or a tent pitched, over stationary rituals. The solid edifices were not built until the end of the sixteenth century in India and the middle of the eighteenth century in Western Asia. These are known as Imambaras, Ashur-Khanehs, Takīyehs, Husaynīyehs, and so forth.

The place of Husayn's martyrdom, Karbalā', became a venerated spot for pilgrims. There is an extant account of a pilgrimage which occurred some four years after his death. The pilgrims, who were warriors and avengers of Husayn's blood, called themselves penitents (*tawwābūn*). They marched against Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, the man who laid seige to Husayn's camp at Karbalā'. During this vengeful military operation, the warriors stopped in order to pay homage to their martyred hero, and as they moaned and wailed day

² Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York, 1978), pp. 146, 153.

and night they recalled the tragic events of the Karbalā' massacre. They wept so much that 'the sand of the desert became soaked, as if by a current of water'.³ This became the prototype for subsequent rituals, especially for a ritual known as the *majlis-e 'azā*.

In Baghdad, in the fourth Islamic century, during the Buyid reign of Mu'izz al-Dawla, on the day of Husayn's martyrdom, known as 'Āshūrā' (10th Muḥarram), the bazaars closed and the people circumambulated the city, weeping, wailing, striking their heads, the women dishevelled, everyone in torn, black clothing, mourning for Husayn.⁴ Such a public display of grief in processions has become the most common form of ritual for Husayn all over the world, in places as distant from Karbalā' as Madras in Southern India and Port of Spain in Trinidad.

I: IRAN

Ritual processions are usually held in the month of Muḥarram and the following month of Šafar, especially on the 10th of Muḥarram ('Āshūrā') and the 20th of Šafar, known as Arba'in or Chella, which is the fortieth day after Husayn's death. The activities among the marchers, their costumes, clothing, the objects carried, and the accompanying music may differ not only from country to country but also from district to district.

In Iran, these processions are called DASTA-YE 'AZĀDĀRĪ, and they take place in the streets and public squares and in the countryside. They can be simple marches or elaborate pageants, with the characters dressed in colourful costumes, either marching or riding on horses or camels and bearing arms.⁵ Live tableaux (floats) representing the scene of the tragedy with mutilated bloody bodies are accompanied by dirges, bands, singing and drums. These are interspersed with men flagellating themselves. The fundamental components seem to be the same but the methods of self-mortification differ. Some beat their chests with their hands (*sīnehzani*), others beat their backs with chains (*zanjīrzani*), and still another group beat their heads with swords and knives, so that blood streams down their faces, necks and chests (*shamshīrzani*).

³ Bal'ami, *Annals of Tabari*, tr. Zotenberg aris, 1958), IV, pp. 70-71.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* (Cairo, 1358), XI, p. 243.

⁵ See plate 1.

Some mortify themselves with stones. All this is done to demonstrate their grief for the wounds the martyrs received at Karbalā'.

Their self-mortification is an attempt to identify themselves with the suffering of Ḥusayn as though Karbalā' could be reproduced in the present and they could share in the Imam's passion of martyrdom.

The grandest procession always takes place on the day of 'Āshūrā'. Each district of a town or city usually has its own order of precedence. The processions join in a fore-ordained succession and end in a specified locality.⁶

The most important object always carried in the procession is the 'ALAM, which signifies the standard of Ḥusayn at Karbalā'.⁷ This most sacred object gives the participants the feeling that they are actually fighting at Karbalā'. In the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent there are special processions where only 'alams are carried. The reverence for them is universal and special edifices have been constructed to house them as sacred reliquaries.

'Alams are generally made of metal standards, elaborately decorated with plumes, sacred objects, colourful brocades and silks. Some are as high as ten feet, but the sizes vary.⁸

As the 'alam is a symbol of fighting for the uncompromising cause of right and justice, so the NAKHL (date-palm) is the symbol of death for the cause—it represents the bier of Ḥusayn, that is, of Ḥusayn's beheaded corpse, which was carried from the battlefield at Karbalā' to his resting place on a stretcher of date-palm wood. Through the centuries the *nakhl* has lost its resemblance to the original stretcher and has become a structure of various sizes, from small to enormous, like a wooden lattice, shaped in the form of a tear drop, reminiscent of the tears of the faithful shed for Ḥusayn. While this permanent structure is left bare during the rest of the

⁶ G. E. Von Grunebaum, 'The Tenth of Muharram', in *Muhammadan Festivals* (London, 1958), pp. 85-94, Peter Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York and Tehran, 1979), Monchi-Zadeh, *Ta'ziya des Persischen Passionsspiel* (Upsala, 1967).

⁷ See plate 2.

⁸ C. M. Marr, 'Moharram', in *Tradicionalnaya Kultura Piereedney i Sredney Azyi*, Sbornik Muzei Antropologii i Etnografii (Leningrad, 1970), XXVI, 313-366.



PLATE I

Neyrocz, Central Iran; the arch-villain Shahr in procession.

(Photo: K. Bayegan, 1977)



PLATE 2
Shiraz, Iran; *'alam*.
(Photo.: W. Shpall, 1976)

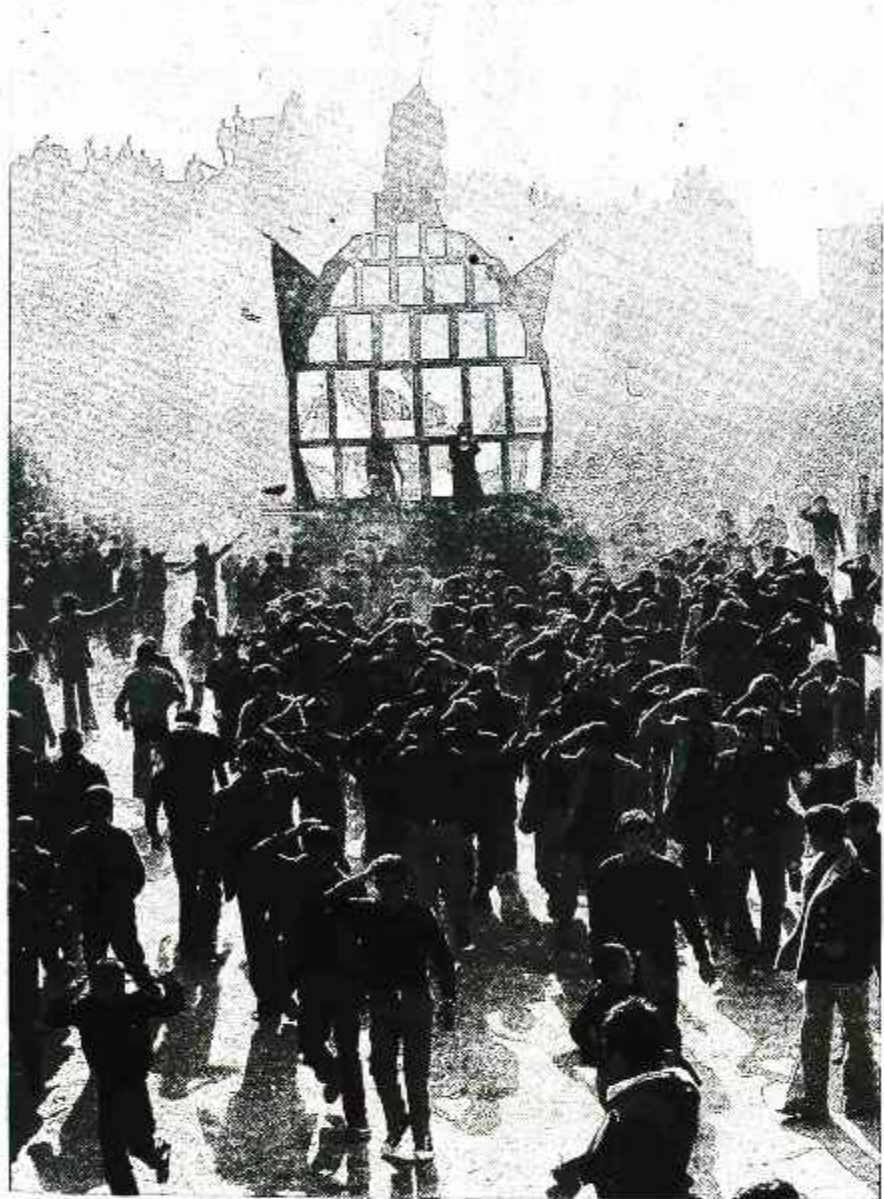


PLATE 3

Neyreez, Central Iran; *nakhl* representing the bier of
Imam Husayn, decorated with mirrors.

(Photo.: K. Bayegan, 1976)

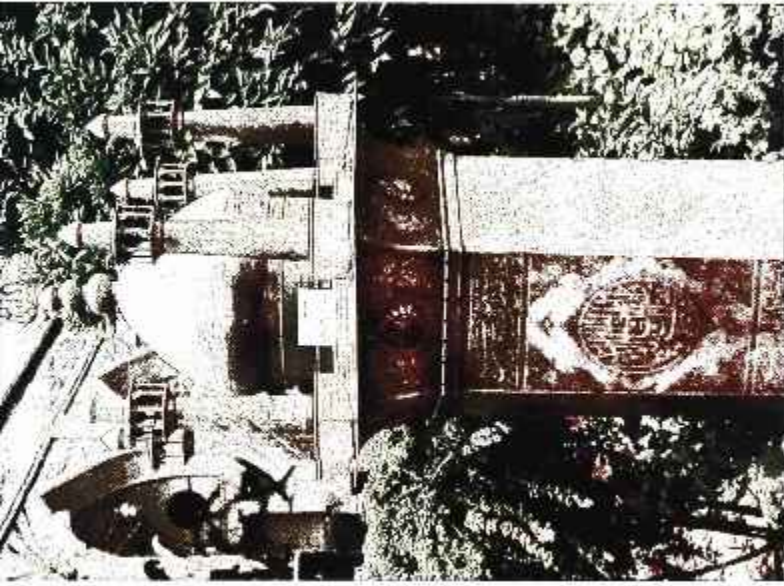


PLATE 4

Shiraz, Iran; *saqqā'-khāneh* in the shape of the local Shāh Cherāgh shrine.
(Photo.: W. Shpall, 1976)

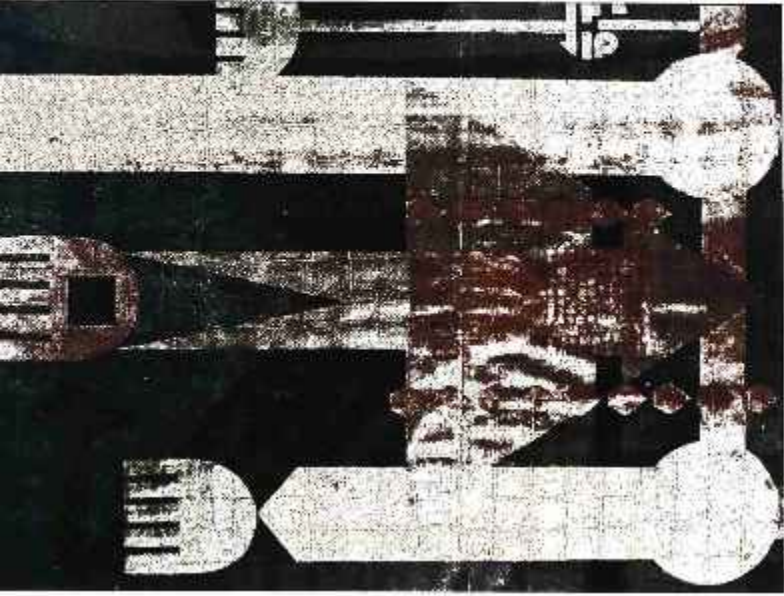


PLATE 5

Iran; Saqqā'-Khāneh school of painting; early 1960s. Three *panjas*, each representing the five sacred persons of Muḥammad, Fātima, 'Alī, Ḥasan, and Husayn.

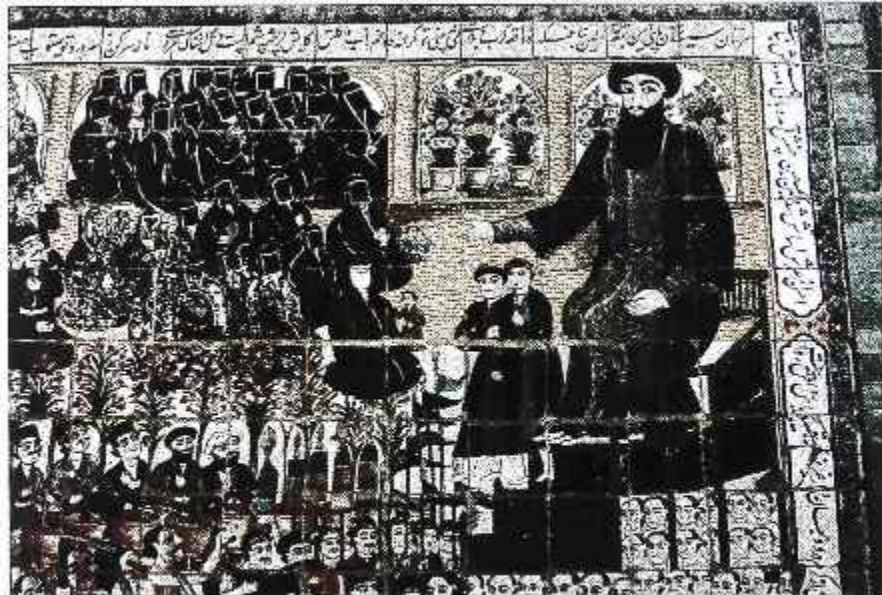


PLATE 6

Takiyeh Mu'avin al-Mulk, Kermanshah, Western Iran;
tile painting representing the *rawza-khānī*.
(19th cent.)



PLATE 7

Hussein Abad Imambara, Lucknow, India; a complex
of buildings and courtyards.
(Photo.: G. Chelkowski, 1983)

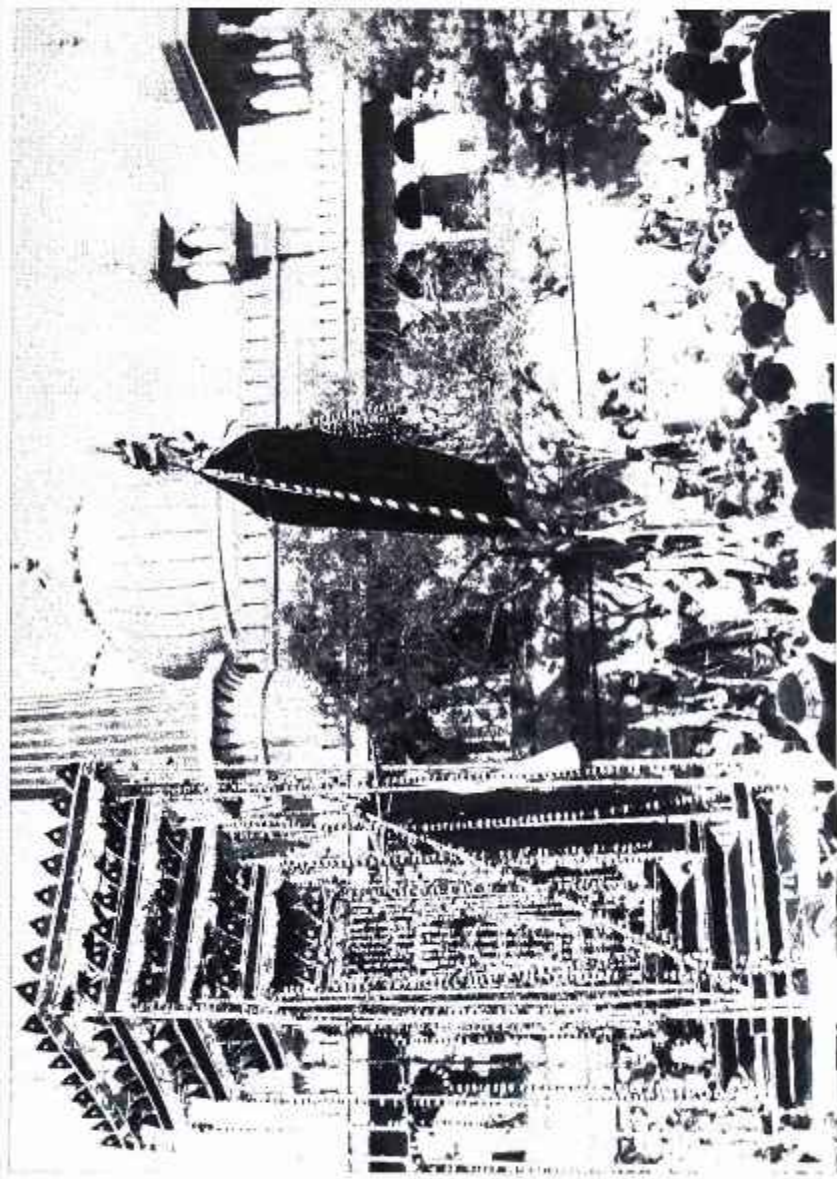


PLATE 8

India-Delhi; *Ta'ziyeh* being carried in a procession.

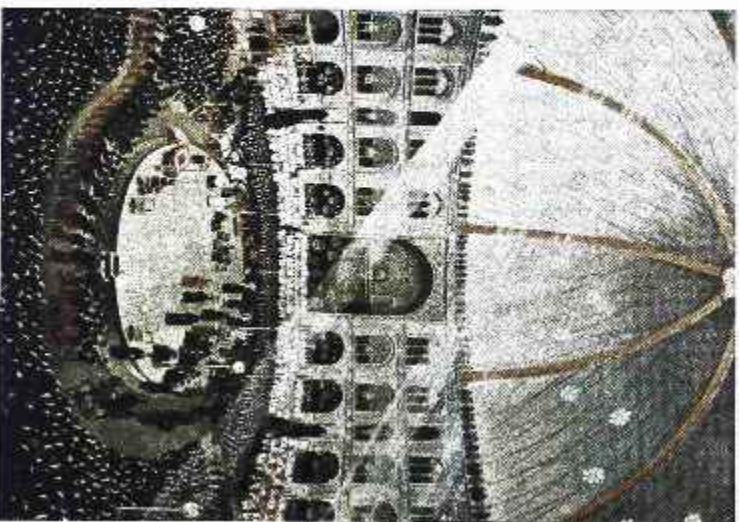


PLATE 9

Takiyeh Dawlat, Tehran, Iran.

(Copy of painting by Kemal al-Muluk)

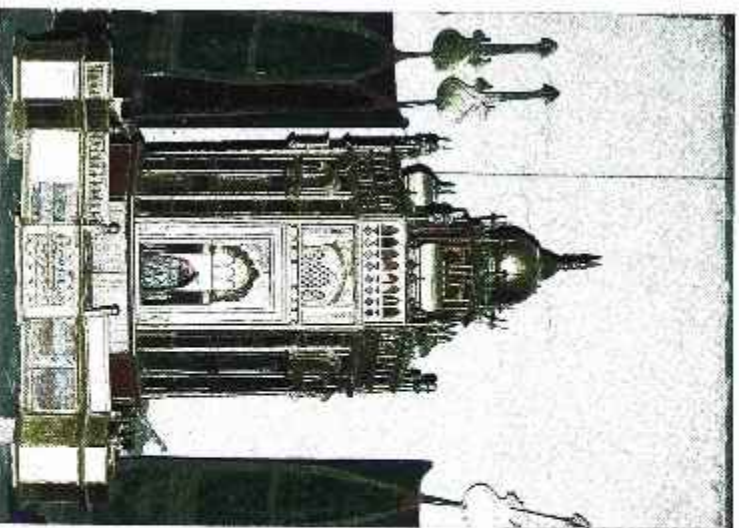


PLATE 10

Najaf Ashraf Imambara, Lucknow, India: *zareeh*, a solid replica of the tomb of Imam Husayn surrounded by *alamis*.

(photo: G. Chelkowski, 1983)

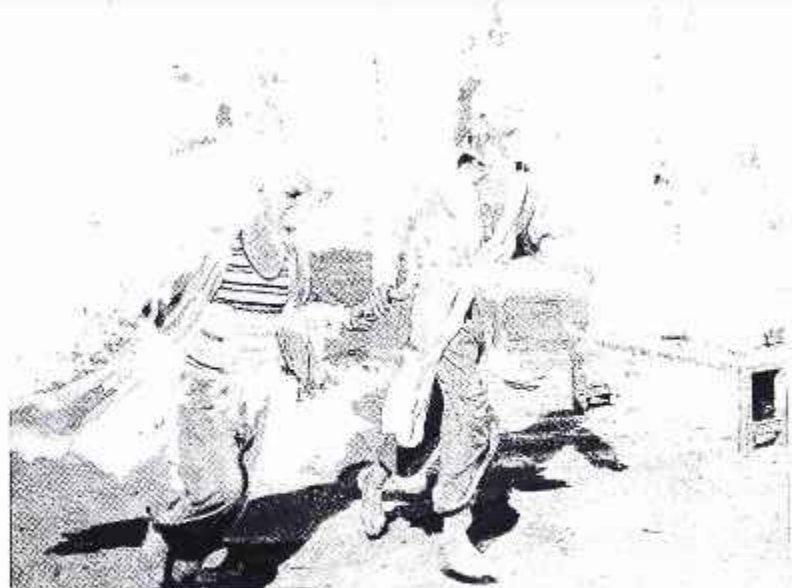


PLATE 11

Iran-Kaftarak, nr. Shiraz, Iran; *ta'ziyeh*, the martyrdom of the children of Muslim b. 'Aqīl. (1976)

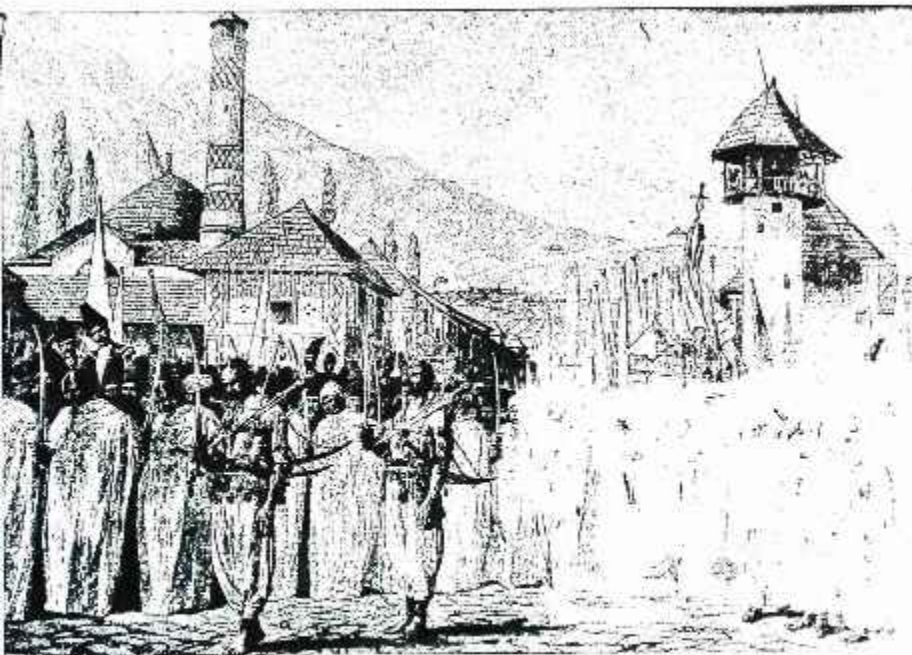


PLATE 12

Caucasus (19th cent.); 'Ashūrā' procession, men in white shrouds beating their foreheads with swords.

(After B. Zereschaguine, *Voyage dans les provinces du*

year, in Muḥarram it is decorated with silks, fine carpets, and brocades. These large ones are carried in the processions by many men.⁹

Another symbol of death is the TĀBŪT—a bier, like the drapery-covered coffin used nowadays throughout the Islamic world in ordinary funerals.

Since Ḥusayn and his followers were cut off from water, suffering from terrible thirst in the sun-scorched sands of the desert, the routes of the Muḥarram processions and the places of the stationary rituals are provided with portable water containers, shaped like a saint's tomb.

In the maze of small alleys in a traditional Iranian town, or in the labyrinth of the bazaar, one passes by a wall in which there is a niche containing a large brass receptacle with a tap. There are also several brass drinking cups attached to the container by chains. The niche is decorated with wall paintings or tiles showing scenes from Karbalā' or symbolic ShĪ'Ī attributes. There is a low grille over which people reach to get water.

On Thursday evening this little SAQQĀ-KHĀNEH ('House of the Water-Carrier') is lit by candles and there is an attendant serving the water and singing dirges. He is also responsible for keeping the container filled during the rest of the week. A religious endowment pays him for these duties.

People slake their thirst here all week long. This has been the symbolic meaning of counteracting the thirst of Karbalā' and is also a funerary ritual in so far as the receptacle is surmounted by a dome, symbolizing a sepulchre of a martyred saint.¹⁰ In so far as this is so, the water receptacle comes to mean a minor pilgrimage to a tomb, and people tie bits of cloth to the small grille as they would in the case of the real saint's burial site. The most important tomb is that of Ḥusayn, who is perceived by the ShĪ'a as the 'Fountain of Faith'. Therefore the water from the *saqqā-khāneh* is considered to be blessed. Since 'Abbās was not only Ḥusayn's standard-bearer but also his water carrier (he was killed while trying to get water from the Euphrates river

⁹ Hechmatolla Tabibi, 'Ceremonies traditionnelles du *naxl* à Natanz', *Objets et Mondes*, Musée de l'Homme (Paris, 1977), XVII/4, 175-178. See plate 3.

¹⁰ See plate 4.

for Husayn and his family), the *saqqā'-khāneh* is often regarded as a shrine to 'Abbās.

In the 1960s the *saqqā'-khāneh* gave its name to an school of painting in Iran. The new generation of painters, mostly educated in the West, tried to bridge modern modalities with the Shī'ī popular tradition.¹¹

The stationary ritual is called the MAJLIS (pl. *majālis*), meaning 'gathering', 'assembly', 'meeting'. The root of this is derived from *jalasa* which means 'to sit'. The overall term should be *majlis-e 'azā*, meaning a 'mourning gathering'. On the Indian subcontinent the 'azā is usually dropped, while in Iran *majlis* is dropped and instead of *majlis-e rawzeh-khānī* or *majlis-e ta'zīyeh* only *rawzeh-khānī* and *ta'zīyeh* are in common usage.

RAWZEH-KHĀNĪ is an Iranian ritual of publicly recited, chanted elegies which concern the suffering of Husayn and the other Shī'ī martyrs. Together with the passion plays and the Muḥarram mourning processions, they constitute the tripod of Shī'ī mourning observances.

The recitation and chanting of eulogies for the Shī'ī martyrs go back at least to the year 65. Mourning literature, known as MAQĀTIL, was mainly written in Arabic. Contemporaneous with the establishment of Shī'ism as the state religion of Iran by the Safavid king in 1501 was the composition of the *maqal* literary masterpiece by Husayn Wā'iz Kāshifī, written in Persian, but under the Arabic title of *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā'* (*The Garden of the Martyrs*).¹² *Rawzeh-khānī* derives its name from the above. The second word in the title is replaced by *khānī*, meaning 'chanting recitation', from the Persian verb *khāndan*, meaning 'to read, recite or chant'.

The public lamentation of *rawzeh-khānī* is performed particularly during the mourning months of Muḥarram and the following month of Šafar. Such acts of piety may take place during some eighty days of mourning throughout the year of the Shī'ī calendar, and also upon the recovery of someone's health, the safe return from a pilgrimage, and so on.

¹¹ See plate 5.

¹² Wā'iz Kāshifī, *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā'* (Tehran, 1341).

Rawzeh-khānī, popularly called RAWZEH, is participated in by all classes of society and takes place in specially erected black tents in the public square of a town or village, or in mosques or the courtyards of private houses, as well as in special buildings known as Husaynīyehs or Takīyehs. These places are well carpeted and decorated with black mourning standards and flags, as well as a variety of weapons reminiscent of the battle of Karbalā'. In private houses refreshments are provided by the hosts.

Rawza usually begins with the singing of a panegyric to the Prophet and the saints by a man called *madda*. It is a combination of recitation and singing in slow cadences. This paves the way for a *rawzeh-khān* (also known as the *vā'iz*) who is a well trained preacher and who alternates storytelling with songs about Husayn and the attendant martyrs.¹³ Rapid chanting in a high-pitched voice is interrupted by sobbing and crying. Towards the end of the performance, when the audience has been aroused to intense emotion, the *rawzeh-khānī* ends with congregational singing of dirges called *nawha*.

The performances may last for several hours to an entire day and well into the night, with alternating chanters. *Rawza* creates a very emotional atmosphere among the participants, which can result in weeping, breast-beating and body flagellation, as in the Muḥarram parades. An old preacher may collect the tears of the participants in a bottle, to be used as an unction for the dying.

After the readings in early times the *Rawzat al-Shuhadā'* began to serve as a framework and as a springboard for professional narrators who improvised creatively upon the suffering and deeds of many Shī'ī heroes. Through the choice of episodes and the modulations of their voices, they are able to excite and manipulate the emotions of their audiences and to arouse in them a unity of feeling of great intensity, so that they identify with the suffering of the martyrs, who, in turn, will serve as intercessors for the participants on the day of the Last Judgement.

Habitually, the *rawzeh-khans* make digressions and comparisons with contemporary political, moral, and social situations,

¹³ See plate 6.

evoking in the audience a particular socio-religious climate which can move them to political action.¹⁴

Hei'at-e mazhabis (religious gatherings) create a perfect forum for *rawzeh-khānī*. There are two main kinds of *hei'at-e mazhabi*; one is organized by a town district and called *hei'at-e mahaleh*; the other is associated with the guild and is called *hei'at-e senft*. The first is open to the neighbourhood, and is usually organized by the pious members of the area; the latter is mainly for the members of the same trade. These meetings occur all the year round. They can take place in a fixed location on a set day, or they can be on a rotating basis. In a *mahal* (district) these two meetings are never called on the same day and they may last 3-4 hours. *Hei'at-e mahaleh* sometimes result from a vow to hold such a meeting at home if a prayed-for wish has been granted.

The meeting usually begins at sunset, allowing the participants the opportunity to pray together as a group at the evening prayer. After some recitation from the Koran, the *rawzeh-khānī* takes place. Politics and local events of significance are discussed at the end of the meeting. Refreshments are then served.¹⁵

Before the rapid westernization of Iran in the 1970s, the whole fabric of Iranian society was linked to the Karbalā' events in one way or another. This is reflected in linguistic patterns and the daily manners of life. *Naqqālī* (traditional story-telling) is usually devoted to the national epic and the *Shāhnāme* is often juxtaposed with the battle of Karbalā'. If a *naqqālī* takes place on one of the eighty days of mourning of the Shī'ī calendar, the *Shāhnāme* recitation becomes *rawzeh-khānī*.

The root of *ta'zīyeh* in the Arabic language is 'azā, signifying mourning, condolence, and sympathy. In Iraq *ta'zīyeh* refers to a mourning gathering: *majlis*. On the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, the artistic replica of the tomb of Husayn is called a *ta'zīyeh*. In Iran the same term signifies the Shī'ī passion play.

¹⁴ Muhammad Djafar Mahdjoub, 'From Faza'il-khvānī and Manāqib-khvānī to Rawzah-khānī', in *Iran Nameh, A Persian Journal of Iranian Studies* (Washington, D.C.), Spring 1984, II/3, 402-431.

¹⁵ Gustav Thaiss, 'Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Hussein', in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis* (Berkeley, 1978), pp. 349-366.

TA'ZĪYEH-KHĀNĪ, or *shabih-khānī*, popularly known as TA'ZĪYEH, is the ShĪ'Ī passion play performed mainly in Iran. The only indigenous and serious drama in the Islamic world, *ta'zīyeh* describes the death of Ḥusayn and his followers on the plain of Karbalā'.

The *ta'zīyeh* drama which emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century was derived from the Muḥarram parades and the *rawzeh-khānī* recitations in the form of the *majlis*. While originally performed at cross-roads and in public squares,¹⁶ *ta'zīyeh* performances soon moved first to caravanserais and private houses, and then to specially built theatres called *takīyehs* or Husaynīyehs. Theatres of various size and construction were built, finally reaching enormous proportions in the huge, elaborate structure built by Naṣ al-Dīn Shāh in the 1870s called the Takīyeh Dawlat.¹⁷

All these performance areas or playhouses have in common a raised circular or square platform upon which the main action takes place. This is surrounded by a narrow strip which is circumambulated or ridden about by the performers to indicate the passage of time or a change of place. This space, as well as several entrances and exits, extends into and through the audience-filled pit where people sit on the ground. In large or opulent homes or theatres, the elite sit in elevated boxes or balconies, where they are well served with food and drink. Water and sweetmeats are also distributed among the general audience—an egalitarian rite. Nowadays, *ta'zīyeh* can be performed throughout the year, but originally it was staged only in the month of Muḥarram and following the month of Ṣafar.

The protagonists dress predominantly in green, and sing their parts, while the villains, who wear red, speak their lines. Symbolic properties, such as a bowl of water to represent a river, are improvised according to need, particularly in the villages where costumes and properties are scarce. The director-producer is omnipresent on the stage as prompter, property man, and regulator of the actors, musicians, and viewers. Villagers and townsmen participate when professional actors are few, but troops of actors

¹⁶ See plate 11.

¹⁷ See plate 9.

travel from place to place, with men playing the women's roles. Parts are often passed from father to son in family groups: it is a hereditary trade.

Audience participation is so intense that men and women mourn and weep as though the scenes before them were taking place in the immediate present. Remorse that Husayn should have been allowed to die so horrible a death is felt as a personal loss here and now.

The heyday of the *ta'zīyeh* was in the second half of the nineteenth century. In recent years, due to overt westernization on the one hand, and because of socio-political reasons on the other, the *ta'zīyeh*, which had been an urban creation, retreated to the rural areas. The *ta'zīyeh* repertory is enormous. In addition to the Karbalā' events, it also deals with martyrdom prior to, and after, the death of Husayn, and Qur'ānic stories or simple stories related to a particular locality. Whatever the tale, it is then always related to the martyrs of Karbalā'. This juxtaposition in turn amplifies those happenings.

The main part of the repertory consists of plays devoted to Husayn, 'Abbās, Qāsim, 'Alī Akbar, Hurr, Muslim, and the captivity of the related women.¹⁸

The Shī'a of the Caucasus (part of Iran until the early nineteenth century) and of Iraq and southern Lebanon perform *ta'zīyeh* passion plays on a more limited scale.

The *SUFREH-YE HAẒRAT-E 'ABBĀS* is another type of mourning ritual not directly devoted to the Imam Husayn, but to his half-brother and standard-bearer on the plain of Karbalā', 'Abbās. Thanks to his chivalry, gallantry, and bravery, 'Abbās enjoys a special place in the Shī'ī communities, particularly among the women. *Sufreh* is a serving cloth upon which they spread food following a vow made by somebody, and during the ensuing feast there are reminiscences and stories told about 'Abbās and Karbalā'. Afterwards, food is distributed among the poor.

The *SHAMAYEL GARDĀNĪ*, OR *PARDEH DĀRĪ* is a one-man show with a backdrop painting depicting the scenes of the battle of Karbalā', from left to right, painted in cartoon style. There

¹⁸ The extensive bibliography about *ta'zīyeh* can be found in Peter Chelkowski, *Ta'zīyeh*, pp. 255-268.

is a definite sequence of events of the battle. On the right side of the painting there are scenes of the hereafter, which represent the fate of Ḥusayn's supporters in the beautiful vista of paradise, while his opponents are tortured in hell. This oil painting is generally $3\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ metres, on canvas, and is easily rolled up for transportation.¹⁹ The *pardeh-dār* (singer) goes from one locality to another, hangs the painting and sings the story, using a pointer to elucidate the scenes.

II: IRAQ

In Iraq, where the most sacred ShĪ'Ī places like Karbalā' and Najaf are situated, the processions do not differ greatly from the Iranian ones. As in Iran chain-beaters divide themselves into groups along both sides of the route in single file, wearing black shirts with cut-outs on the back, so that the chains hit their flesh directly. The music and singing provide a rhythm for marching and bilateral arm swinging with the chains.

That which in Iran is called *dasta*, in Iraq is called MAWKĪB. In most cases the processions are also organized by different guilds as well as by town districts. The organization of the rituals differs from place to place. In the city of Kazamain, for example, the chain-beaters mortify themselves in the afternoon, the breast-beaters in the evening, and those who hit their heads with swords or sabres only do this in the morning of the day of 'Āshūrā'.

As in Iran the procession, while passing through open places or squares, stops in order to sing *nawhas* (dirges) concerning various events of Karbalā', such as the wedding of Qāsim. There is no acting out, only singing in which the surrounding crowd acts like a chorus, sometimes repeating the refrain of the dirge, sometimes beating their breasts.²⁰

In Iraq the *majlis*, called *ta'zīyeh*, or recitation, can take place in the courtyard of a mosque, in a Ḥusayniyeh, in a house of the people, or at almost any place suitable for such a ceremony. During the first ten days of Muḥarram, a KHAṬĪB or QĀRĪ' (a preacher or declaimer) recites the martyrdom of Ḥusayn. Generally he tells

¹⁹ See plate 8.

²⁰ Ibrahim al-Haidari, *Zur Soziologie des schītischen Chiliasmus* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1975), pp. 39-41, 41-51.

the story pertinent to the corresponding day of Muḥarram.²¹ As in Iran the scenes and themes are multiple and rich and are usually based on the *maqātil* literature. The central theme concerns the death of Ḥusayn at the battle of Karbalā' as well as the fate of his family, which are presented in various stories, myths and legends.

The gathering place is bedecked with precious carpets. The walls are hung with black cloths, black flags are hoisted and other paraphernalia symbolizing the battle, like shields, helmets and swords, are erected. All these objects succeed in producing an atmosphere in which Karbalā' becomes fused with the present.

Opposite to the entrance the *mimbar* (pulpit) is installed. Benches and chairs are placed along the walls of the courtyard where the sayyids (the descendants of the Prophet), the shaykhs, and other people are seated. The other participants sit on the ground forming a circle around the *mimbar*. The women are accommodated separately: they sit on the balconies or in the back rooms.

The preacher, as in Iran, draws parallels between the present local situation and the injustice of the Umayyads. Additionally he embellishes his recitation with elegies and dirges about the martyrs, which are mostly sung in an Iraqi dialect, and are repeated by the assembled people. The preachers stir up the participants to sadness and mourning, hoping to induce weeping and wailing. Some weep loudly and beat their breasts or foreheads. Others hit themselves on the knees. Together with declamations against the Omayyads, particularly against Yazīd and Shimr, loud curses can be heard such as: 'May God curse Yazīd.' The others cry: 'O Ḥusayn, I wish that God had offered me up in your stead', or 'If we had only been with you we would have attained paradise.' From the first to the fifth day of Muḥarram the general story of Karbalā' is recited. On the sixth day the story of Muslim is told, on the seventh that of 'Abbās, on the eighth that of Qāsim, on the ninth that of 'Alī Akbar, and on the tenth day of Muḥarram, 'Āshūrā', when emotions have attained their highest pitch, the story of Husayn is told. The gathering then begin to beat their breasts while calling out: 'The horses which stamped on your breast should have stamped on ours

²¹ Each of the first ten days of Muḥarram is devoted to a different hero of Karbalā'. However, it is not a universal division. The only certain day is the 10th of Muḥarram, devoted to the martyrdom of Husayn.

also.' They smear their foreheads with the earth of Karbalā' trying to show their emotional participation. Finally, such a *majlis* ends with the salutation to Ḥusayn, during which all turn towards Karbalā', stretching their hands up to the sky. Then they all turn toward Najaf and lastly to Samarra, in greeting to the Hidden Imam, begging him to hasten his return.

A *majlis* may last from half an hour to an hour, depending on the circumstances. (In Iran, the duration may be from several hours to a whole day.) Tea and two kinds of cake are distributed as well as cigarettes. Cool water is served by boys as well as sherbet, a drink of rosewater and sugar.

Between the 7th and 10th of Muḥarram small interludes are acted out, representing such people as Qasim or 'Abbās, contributing to the heightening of the emotions.

The women also have a *ta'zīyeh* separately from the men. In every respected and wealthy family a women's ten days *qirāya* is annually undertaken during the months of Muḥarram and Ṣafar. The women sit in a circle, their hair loose, clothed in black. A MULLĀYA (singer) begins by reciting the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and his family at Karbalā'. After about half an hour the *mullāya* steps down into the middle of the circle and starts to sing dirges in an elegaic modality, while the women beat their breasts with their hands and give out the interrupted rhythmic call 'aho-aho'. They repeat the first line of the dirge like a refrain. Generally the *mullāya* by the quality of her voice stimulates the participants to weeping. The behaviour of the women becomes more and more ecstatic. The rocking of the bodies forward and backwards becomes stronger while they beat their breasts vigorously, sometimes hitting themselves in the face. On the day of 'Āshūrā' women even bare their torsos and beat their breasts or heads. The women and girls standing outside the circle shriek loudly 'Yā 'bū, yā 'bū' (lit. 'Father, father . . .').

The women's *ta'zīyeh* also lasts between half an hour and an hour. Generally there is a little pause during which cigarettes, tea and water are handed out. On the 7th of Muḥarram, 'Abbās' day, 'Abbās bread' is offered with cheese and green salad. The *qirāya* generally ends at the high emotional point when the women beat their breasts and call out: 'Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn'.

One of the oldest Shī'ī communities among the Arabs is located in Southern Lebanon. For centuries Lebanon has been the breeding ground for Shī'ī learned men who migrated to other Shī'ī communities worldwide, and taught Shī'ism. Popular Shī'ism in the form of mourning rituals was hardly known until the end of the nineteenth century when, under the influence of Iran, they began to appear and slowly multiplied.

III: THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD

In recent years the traditionally underprivileged Shī'ī community increased until there are now more Shī'as than any other religious group in Lebanon. They have become politically aware, and have tried to show that they deserve a larger share in the economic and political life of the country. Popular mourning rituals increased rapidly in proportion to this growth. Nabatia became the centre of mourning for Ḥusayn. Even passion plays are performed there. Processions and *majlises* now commonly occur not only in the South but even to the East in the Bekaa Valley.²²

The island of Bahrein had been under Iranian domination for centuries. Arab and Persian ethnic groups intermarry but they speak Arabic, with some Persian. However, more than half the population is Shī'ī. All mourning rituals correspond to those in Iran, with slight local variations.

IV: TURKIC PEOPLES

The mourning ceremonies for Ḥusayn among the Turkic peoples received much attention from European travellers as early as the seventeenth century, particularly in the Caucasus which today is Soviet Azerbaijan,²³ as well as in Iranian Azerbaijan.

Until about 1917 (the year of the Soviet Revolution) the Turks of the Caucasus engaged in extreme self-mortification practices, especially during the first ten days of Muḥarram.²⁴ Multitudes of

²² Wadda Chrara, *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban-sud (Ashura)* (Beirut, 1968); Frédéric Maatouk, *La Représentation de la mort de l'Imam Hussein à Nabatieh (Liban-Sud)* (Beirut, 1974).

²³ Adam Olearius, *Relation du voyage . . .* (Schleswig, 1956). Ivan J. Lassy, *The Muharram Mysteries among the Azerbaijan Turks of Caucasia* (Helsingfors, 1916).

²⁴ See plate 12.

people participated in these rituals during the processions. Passion plays were also performed in the open. In Iranian Azerbaijan these practices still continue. Additionally mock battles on horseback and on foot, re-enacting Karbalā', are staged in large squares. Special mourning rituals by women for women were very famous in Azerbaijan.

Across the border in Anatolia, the mourning rituals are more restrained. The most common of them is fasting, which lasts from sunrise to sunset, during the first ten days of Muḥarram. This practice is especially hard when Muḥarram happens during the summer and the fasters do not take any liquids. In the evening there is a communal breaking of the fast. Some communities extend this fasting for twelve days, one for each Imam. The twelfth day leads to a joyful festival in honour of the Twelfth Imam who is, after all, still alive and is expected to return.

On 'Āshūrā', there is a special cooking ceremonial for a dish called *aşure*. This is especially common among the Bek-tashi order of dervishes. Cereals, nuts, and dried fruit are collected and cooked in a huge cauldron while the community watches and sings dirges. This meal is consumed by everyone present.

Turkish literature about the passion of Husayn is very extensive. Most of the literary masterpieces are divided into ten chapters, each called a *meçles* (*majlis*). Each of these chapters in turn is used for a daily *meçles* gathering during the first ten days of Muḥarram and is utilized by the corresponding narrator. The audience participates in a restrained fashion, not however devoid of great emotion. In Eastern Anatolia nowadays processions and mortifications take place on a limited scale.²⁵

In Turkey the devotion to Husayn often transcends sectarian boundaries. One of the most moving mourning rituals is a *ziker* (literary remembrance: consisting of invocation, prayer, singing, music and body movement) by the Sunni order of Sufis called Jarrahi-Khalvati. During the *ziker* devoted to the

²⁵ Metin And, 'The Muharram Observances in Anatolian Turkey', in Peter J. Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh*, pp. 238-254.

Imam Ḥusayn the Sufis, dressed in white, sing eulogies for Ḥusayn and his martyred followers, accompanied by the music of many instruments. A circular dance follows.

V: THE INDO-PAKISTAN SUBCONTINENT

On the Indian subcontinent the buildings connected with mourning rituals were constructed whenever and wherever Shī'ism had spread under the patronage of the local Shī'ī rulers. Considering the distance of the subcontinent from Karbalā', Najaf, and other holy Shī'ī places, a rallying point was needed to maintain the integrity of the Shī'ī community. Such a locus has been provided by the structures devoted to the memory of the Shī'ī martyrs. In addition to the difficulties of travel to the holy places, the Shī'a of India were like islands in a sea of Hinduism, prior to the creation of Pakistan.

For almost four hundred years the buildings generally known as Aza-khanas, Ashur-khanas or Imambaras have served in some places, like Hyderabad, as functional places for mourning gatherings (*majlis*), as points of departure for processions, and as depositories for the standards ('*alams*) and the replicas of the tombs of the Imam Ḥusayn and his companions called *ta'zīyeh* and Zareeh.²⁶ Symbolically the '*alam* represents courage, chivalry, justice and purity. The *ta'zīyeh* symbolizes suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom.

The TA'ZĪYEH is a symbolic miniature reproduction of an Imam's tomb, which is carried in procession and housed in an Imambara or a private house. These *ta'zīyehs* are not literal facsimiles of any one tomb, but imaginary creations of what such a tomb should look like, in the eyes of the artist. Most of them are made of bamboo or sticks covered with colourful paper and papier mâché. The structures resemble more closely the Indian architecture than the architecture of Western Asia where the original tombs were built.²⁷ They can be small enough for two men to carry or immense structures carried by many people. At the conclusion of the procession these *ta'zīyehs* may be buried in a local 'Karbalā' Ground'.

²⁶ See plate 7.

²⁷ Sadiq Naqvi, *Qutb Shahi Ashur Khanas of Hyderabad City* (Hyderabad, 1982).

In Western Asia many pious Shī'a want to be buried in the holy grounds between Karbalā' and Najaf. Even when there was no refrigeration their wish could be granted and their bodies could be transported to Karbalā' for burial. But this was prohibitive for the Shī'a of the subcontinent, unless they settled down in Karbalā' before they died. That is why the symbolic holy Karbalā' grounds were established on the subcontinent. Not all *ta'zīyehs* are buried; some are returned to the Imambaras, others to private houses. A ZAREEH is the same type of structure as the *ta'zīyeh* but is made of durable material, generally of silver.²⁸ (The name actually means a silver railing around of tomb of a saint.)²⁹

As for self-mortification, which is known as MATĀM, there are similarities with the rites of Western Asia in that the participants beat their chests and backs with their hands and with chains respectively, or their foreheads with knives. This may take place in the precincts of the Imambara or in a procession in the streets. They also sing dirges and recite elegies. Here there are no dramatic forms connected with the passion of the Imam Husayn.

Since the creation of Pakistan, the subcontinental tradition has been similar, but there has been a tendency to purify the rituals from extraneous influences. The Imambaras of Pakistan are not as grand as those of Lucknow, but their *majlises* and processions are very elaborate. *ta'zīyehs*, like those in India, can be kept in Imambaras, as well as in private houses.

A major difference between mourning rituals in Western Asia and the subcontinent is that on the subcontinent the Sunnis have their own Muḥarram processions and *majlises* and they carry *'alams* and *ta'zīyehs*, which are kept in private houses. Active participation by non-Muslims in the Shī'ī mourning rituals on the subcontinent is quite common.

VI: THE CARRIBEAN

In Trinidad the processions are called HUSAY FIESTA. They have a festive rather than a mournful character, a Latin influence superimposed on their Indian origin.

²⁸ See plate 10.

²⁹ Census of India 1961, *Moharram in two cities Lucknow and Delhi* (New Delhi, 1966).

CONCLUSIONS

Whether among Persian-speaking people, among the Turks or the Arabs, or in the Urdu-speaking communities of the subcontinent, the Shī'ī mourning rituals show the same public devotion to the Imams and their principles. Despite the language differences or those of the structural form of the rituals, the Shī'a throughout the world have one unifying theme, which is the total devotion to the Imam Ḥusayn and his cause of justice, self-sacrifice and redemption.

For practical purposes I have divided the Shī'ī mourning rituals in Iran and Western Asia from those of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. The processions in both areas are highly charged with emotion although the paraphernalia vary. The replicas of Ḥusayn's tomb carried in Indo-Pakistan do not exist in Western Asia. The passion play is chiefly an Iranian ritual although there are performances in Iraq and Lebanon.

The significance of the rituals must be regarded on the individual as well as on the communal level. Both the participants and the bystanders identify themselves with Ḥusayn. For example, people can see their own reflection in the mirrors with which the large biers of Ḥusayn (*nakhf*) are covered and in this way can be at one with Ḥusayn. During a time of stress and personal tragedy they console themselves by the realization that their own suffering is insignificant in comparison with that of the 'Great Martyr'. This mind-set gives them courage and strength to proceed with their own lives.

On the communal level elaborate preparation is required, involving everyone's contribution of their individual efforts by means of labour, skills, artifacts and money. This then leads to a combined sense of strength and unity both during the performance of the ritual and afterwards. The final communal meal produces relaxation and a brotherly spirit after the emotionally charged days. The timelessness and the potency of these rituals form the nucleus of the Shī'ī religion. The *'ulamā'* may occasionally disapprove of some of these expressions, considering them contributory rather than central to Shī'ism; nevertheless the political aspects of the religion may take full advantage of these popular beliefs by transforming them into mass mobilization and revolution.³⁰

³⁰ Peter J. Chelkowski, 'Iran: Mourning Becomes Revolution', in *Asia* (New York) May/June 1980, 30-45.

FROM MAQĀTIL LITERATURE TO DRAMA¹

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THE passion, courage, and tragic death of the Imam Ḥusayn, his relatives and followers, on the plain of Karbalā', became the subject of a literary genre, known in Arabic as *maqātil*. The *maqātil* literature has flourished in the Muslim world during the last thirteen centuries first in Arabic and then in Persian, to be followed by Turkish and Urdu. Only that in the Persian language, however, inspired the dramatic representations known as *ta'zīyeh-khānī* or *shabīh-khānī*.² Although *ta'zīyeh* is occasionally performed in such Arab countries as Iraq and Lebanon, this must be considered as an importation from Iran rather than as an indigenous modality. The modern Arabic dramatic literature is influenced to a degree by both *maqātil* literature and the *ta'zīyeh-khānī*.

The favourite theme among modern and contemporary Arab playwrights is the paradigm of the Imam Ḥusayn. Though in most cases the plays had not been intended for theatrical production, but rather for silent reading, nevertheless they represent a very potent and powerful dramatic literary genre. The Iranian *ta'zīyeh* plays on the contrary are intended for stage representation only. They are

¹ Thanks must be given to Dr M. Yadegari, I. Anvar, and Dr B. Warburg for their assistance in preparing this article.

² Peter Chelkowski, 'Dramatic and Literary Aspects of *Ta'zīyeh-Khānī*—Iranian Passion Play', in *Review of National Literatures* (New York, Spring 1971), II, 121-138.

written not in the form of a complete script or libretto, in which scenes follow one another in an established order, but as separate parts for each character, written on loose sheets of paper held in the hand of the actors. For this reason it is in a sense an anti-literary form, although the *ta'zīyeh* performances are often noted for their poetic and literary merits. It is interesting therefore to see how an 'acted out version' could influence a 'reading form'. This can be observed in the development of the plot of the literary version.

Contemporary Arab plays about Ḥusayn do not differ greatly from *ta'zīyeh*. The main difference between them lies in the fact that the Arabs use the Ḥusayn paradigm for reflection upon current political situations in their own countries, particularly after the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis in the 1967 war.

The Egyptian playwright 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī should be especially mentioned in this connection as well as an Iraqi dramatist Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥafajī. In the case of al-Sharqāwī the play in two parts, called *Tha'r Allāh* (God's Revenge),³ starts in Medina where Ḥusayn is pressured by the Umayyad political apparatus to pledge formal allegiance to Yazīd after Yazīd's father's death. Al-Sharqāwī shows corruption and abuse of power which lead to lawlessness. The parallels between the state of affairs in the Caliphate at the time of Yazīd and in Egypt just before and after the 1967 war, though allegorical, are not merely implied but obvious. In this play Ḥusayn is not only a symbol of good but becomes the conscience of Muslims for all time.

Al-Sharqāwī's play is the finest example of Ḥusayn being utilized as an embodiment of the revolutionary spirit in the modern Islamic world. Ḥusayn is simultaneously the symbol of gallantry along the lines of ancient Arabic standards of manliness (*murūwwa*) and the classic ideal of Islamic perfection. At present in some of the Muslim countries the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is widening, the rich are no longer satisfied with wealth and power alone but expect flattery from the poor. Those who do not toe the line are severely punished.

In the eyes of the Muslims, Ḥusayn did not fight for wealth,

³ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, born in 1920. Poet, novelist and playwright. The second part of *Tha'r Allāh*, called *Al-Ḥusayn shahīd*, was published in Cairo in 1388/1969; the first part, called *Al-Ḥusayn thā'ir*, was published in 1971.

power, or political ambition, but for the Islamic ideal of social and political justice. Most particularly he fought and sacrificed his life for the underdog, the unprivileged, the oppressed, and the humiliated. The first part of the play, which is called *Al-Husayn thā'ir* (Husayn, the Rebel), could be described as a modern passion play.

It is the second part of the play, entitled *Al-Husayn shahīd* (Husayn, the Martyr), that underlines the universal and timeless qualities of Husayn's martyrdom. Husayn's death is not a useless sacrifice but a turning point in human history, which has been, and always will be, avenged by God. Towards the end of the drama, Husayn's ghostly apparition addresses the audience in a revolutionary manifesto:

Husayn: Remember me by rescuing truth from the tyranny of falsehood, by struggling on the path, so that justice may prevail. . . . Remember me when virtues become homeless and vices alone become

the favourite beloved. . . . If you acquiesce to deception, if man accepts humiliation, I will be massacred anew, I will be killed every day a thousand times, . . . and a new Yazīd will rule over you. . . .¹⁴

In the *ta'zīyeh* repertory, the passage of Husayn from Medina to his death at Karbalā' is represented in ten or more plays, usually starting on the first day of the month of Muḥarram with a play devoted to Husayn's emissary to Kūfa, his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqīl. This is followed in a daily sequence by the martyrdom of two of Muslim's children, and then by the death of various members of Husayn's family, such as 'Abbās, 'Alī Akbar, and Qāsim.

One *ta'zīyeh* play is devoted to a commander of the opposing army, Hurr, who deserts Yazīd's forces, joins Husayn's and is martyred together with Husayn and his supporters. The final play is set for the day of 'Āshūrā', the 10th of Muḥarram, when the death of Husayn himself takes place. All these tragic events were telescoped by al-Sharqāwī into one play in two parts. In the Iranian *ta'zīyeh* plays the paramount message is the intercession of Husayn,

* Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978), pp. 233-234. See also J. Altoma, 'Martyrdom in Arabic Literature', in Cyriac K. Pullapilly (ed.), *Islam in the Contemporary World* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1980), p. 63.

and the spiritual mobilization of the Shī'a. In the Arabic drama, al-Sharqāwī deals with the revolutionary preparedness in the face of the internal and external forces of evil.

The Iraqī playwright Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥafājī, in his drama *Husayn will Come One More Time*, tries likewise to show the similarity of the circumstances which led to the killing of the Imam Husayn and the Arab defeat in the 1967 war.⁵ His main stress is on internal conflicts, lack of leadership, class divisiveness, and national differences among the Arabs. In addition there was the moral decline and corruption among the politicians and the well-to-do. In this concept, Husayn becomes the major revolutionary figure, fighting for justice, equality, and freedom. The religious dimension, and especially the difference between the Shī'a and the Sunni, is de-emphasized.

In *The Suffering of Husayn* by Muḥammad Azīza, the Tunisian playwright, Husayn is not so much a revolutionary as a natural Arab hero. This play is very close to the Iranian *ta'zīyeh*, as the author used the *ta'zīyeh* play manuscripts which were collected by Alexander Chodzko in the nineteenth century.⁶ The main innovation is the employment by the dramatist of a chorus.

The action starts with a messenger who tells Husayn how his envoy, Muslim, was murdered and how Husayn is being betrayed by the people of Kūfa. Husayn is shown as a very human, kind and peace-loving man who becomes a 'lion' when the defence of justice is involved. The long soliloquies and the speeches about parting

⁵ This three-act play, under the title *Tānī Yaḥī al-Ḥusayn*, was published in 1972. Here two other Iraqī playwrights must be mentioned: Muḥammad Riḍa Sharaf al-Dīn, who published in 1933 a long poetic drama (eight acts) under the title *Al-Ḥusayn*, and Al-'Alifī with his play *So Said Husayn*. In neighbouring Syria, 'Adnan Mardam Bek must be mentioned for his play, *Masra' Husayn*.

⁶ Alexander Chodzko, a scholar and diplomat, and the author of books on popular Persian poetry, Persian grammar and customs, was greatly impressed with the *ta'zīyeh* during his stay in Iran in the 1830s. He bought a manuscript consisting of thirty-three plays from the director of the court theatre. The manuscript was later deposited by Chodzko in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Blochet, 1928, *Catalogue des manuscrites persans*). Chodzko edited two of the plays, and published them in Paris in 1852 under the title *Djungi Chehādat*. M. Azīza was very much under the influence of this collection—he mentions that in an unpublished article under the title 'Le Tazie Aujourd'hui'.

and farewells are extremely moving and resemble very closely those in Iranian *ta'zīyeh*. They also have a strong cathartic impact upon the reader or the audience.

The corpus of the *ta'zīyeh* plays is enormous. Since *ta'zīyeh* is a living tradition, new plays and local variations on the traditional themes are still being composed. The Cerulli collection alone—1,055 *ta'zīyeh* manuscripts housed at the Vatican Library—is ample evidence of this. Enrico Cerulli collected those manuscripts in various localities of Iran when he served as the Italian ambassador to Iran from 1950 to 1955.⁷

The Iranian *ta'zīyeh* can be divided into two broad categories: those belonging to the Muḥarram cycle, and those outside it. Even those belonging to the non-Muḥarram group are connected with the Karbalā' tragedy through the employment of *guriz* (comparative reference or digression) to the suffering of Husayn and his followers. These plays concern Qur'ānic stories, *ḥadīth*, legends, and even current events occurring in various localities. Although a story may have taken place in the more remote past—for example Cain's murder of Abel or the suffering of Jacob—it can still be brought into the context of the Karbalā' tragedy because of the common denominator of the suffering and martyrdom at Karbalā', which exceeds all previous and following calamities. The process in the play includes either a direct verbal reference, or the staging of a scene from Husayn's passion, or both.⁸

The following *ta'zīyeh* play, with 'Abbās⁹ as the protagonist, belongs to the Muḥarram cycle. Although this publication is devoted to the Imam Husayn himself, the play about 'Abbās has been chosen deliberately in order to show that whatever the subject may be, the focus is always on Husayn.

In this play the death of Husayn is postponed and heightened by the pain of participating in the suffering and death of his immediate family and followers. This is the first English translation of the text

⁷ Ettore Rossi and Alessio Bombaci, *Elenco Di Drammi Religiosi Persiani* (Città Del Vaticano, 1969).

⁸ See pp. 207–26 of this volume: P. Chelkowski, 'Popular Shī'ī Mourning Rituals'.

⁹ The Persian edited text of this *ta'zīyeh* is published in the Persian language volume of papers presented at this conference.

which comes from Kashan, and is listed under no. 513 in the Cerulli Collection, where it appears as separately written parts for each actor. It has been arranged in the form of a 'libretto'.

'Abbās was Husayn's half-brother and his standard-bearer. If Husayn is the supreme martyr, 'Abbās is regarded as the supreme fighter. Traditionally the play devoted to 'Abbās is enacted on the 9th of Muḥarram known as Tasu'a. The strong personality of 'Abbās is very much admired and venerated in Iran and in Shī'ī communities in other countries. There are many shrines devoted to his name. Many *saqqā'-khāneh*, water cisterns and fountains in towns and villages, are dedicated to his bravery on the plain of Karbalā' when he tried to fetch water for the thirsty family of the Prophet, and had his hands cut off before being killed by Yazīd's men.

Swearing on 'Abbās is the only truly dependable oath in daily life, whereas in contracts his name is added to those of the partners, 'in absentia', to safeguard against the trespassing of anyone's rights. He is also admired by the women for his particular powers. In Iran a feast, *sufreh ḥaẓrat-e 'Abbās*, may be prepared in his honour, as a vowed thanksgiving for a favour received, at which food is distributed to the people.¹⁰

Most *ta'zīyeh* texts are anonymous since the composition is regarded as an act of piety. The Cerulli 513 manuscript is signed by the scribe, Gholam Ḥusayn Ṣāberī, and dated 1331; both the dating and the signing are rather unusual. The text seems to be a mixture of at least two plays on the same subject, which is a very common phenomenon. Most of the *ta'zīyeh* manuscripts are collections of pieces of paper, some two inches wide and about eight inches long, written separately for each character in the play. The actors hold these scraps in their palms and read their lines. When the actors from various locations merge in order to perform together, the scripts may also merge. Although the play is devoted to 'Abbās, it gives an overall picture of the suffering and the death of Husayn, his sons and followers on the plain of Karbalā'. In the *ta'zīyeh* plays all the characters discuss their pre-determined fate. Despite the fact

¹⁰ See pp. 207-26x of this volume: P. Chelkowski, 'Popular Shī'ī Mourning Rituals'.

that the death of 'Abbās took place before that of Ḥusayn and some other members of his family, on the stage 'Abbās describes the death of Ḥusayn and his relatives vividly before the fact, thus arousing the emotions of the audience. Both the actors and the spectators know the totality of the tragedy, and therefore they do not need to keep it secret for the sake of suspense, as is the case in Western theatre.

The bulk of the play deals with the attempt by Shimr, the villain, to seduce 'Abbās away from Ḥusayn in order to become the commander of the enemy's army. This is a potent bribe which 'Abbās sturdily and repeatedly refuses to accept. Temptation is a device frequently used in the drama of both the East and the West. A second dramatic device is that of deception, questioning the courage of the hero. In this case 'Abbās covers his face and intercepts 'Alī Akbar who is bringing water, to test him. The unknown author or authors of this play were quite familiar with these devices. Although long soliloquies are customary in the early *ta'zīyeh* plays, in this instance a rapid dialogue becomes the main mode of personal interaction.

The language, which is in poetry of varied rhythmic patterns, presents an interesting modification of the Western recitative and musical interpretation, in that the good characters sing their lines and the villains recite them. As for the poetic expression, there is a considerable variation of quality which is not unusual in the *ta'zīyeh* repertory.

The several references in the text to the sins of the Shī'a and the redemptive character of Ḥusayn's death bring the tragedy of Karbalā' from the historical time to the present. The actors and spectators feel just as responsible for Ḥusayn's death as those who betrayed and abandoned him in the year 61/680.



THE MARTYRDOM
OF THE LUMINOUS LEADER OF THE BANĪ HĀSHIM,
HAZRAT ABŪ 'L-FAZL AL-'ABBĀS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Imam Husayn

'Abbās

Zaynab

'Alī Akbar

Qāsim

Sakīna

Amīr

Shahrbānū

Shimr

Ibn Sa'd

[*At the perimeter of Husayn's encampment
on the plain of Karbalā'. The night before 'Āshūrā'.]*

Ibn Sa'd: O King of a small army, look toward the battlefield and observe the strength of a great army. O Commander of the Faith, turn away for a moment from your noble family and count the stars if you want to know the number of Yazīd's army. Arise! Destiny has chosen you for martyrdom.

[*In the encampment of Husayn on the plain of Karbalā'.]*

Imam: O Fate, though you may cast upon me, Husayn, immeasurable injustice, load me with oppression, bare me naked, and cast me down in the dust, I will not complain, and my lips will be tightly closed like a flower bud. But you, O Fate, must look at the beautiful image of 'Abbās and regret his imminent loss.

'*Abbās*: O sky, look at Husayn, the Moon of the two Easts. Fill your eyes with tears. O sky, because the king of one small army is forlorn, rip your blue garment of patience to shreds. On the day of battle, if you wish respite from the roaring of 'Abbās, take refuge in some faraway niche of the universe.

'*Alī Akbar*: O Merciful God, I am 'Alī Akbar. I am distraught, mourning for my father's grief. Kindly grant me the pride and happiness of sacrificing myself so that I may be honoured in front of my uncle.

Zaynab: O Creator, have mercy upon Ḥusayn. Show me kindness and relieve my pain. My brother is alone in this strange land. There is no remedy for this affliction. O God, the cure lies in your hands.

Imam: O Brother 'Abbās, O Commander of the Faith, listen for a moment to this forlorn one. Use this opportunity to dig a ditch around the tents.

'*Abbās:* O King of the Lands and the Seas, I will obey your command if you will accept me as your servant. 'Alī Akbar, the light of my Eyes, come here with your followers, companions and Qāsim, and all our righteous friends. Ja'far, go to the left flank to assist the north. I will go to the south with illustrious friends.

'*Alī Akbar:* O Imam of the Heavens and Earth, Ḥusayn, let me sacrifice myself for you. I am going to aid my uncle, 'Abbās. O Crowned Uncle, may I be thy ransom. Leave the digging to me.

'*Abbās:* I am digging this ditch, dear God, so that my sisters will not be afflicted and dishonoured.

'*Alī Akbar:* I am digging this ditch, dear God, so that Umm Layla will not be afflicted and dishonoured.

Qāsim: [*Text missing, begins 'I am digging . . .'*]

'*Abbās:* O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow, when my hands will be cut from my body.

'*Akī Akbar:* O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when Umm Layla will mourn my death.

Qāsim: [*Text missing, begins 'O God, when will . . .'*]

Imam: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when I will fulfil my covenant.

Zaynab: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when I will sacrifice my children for Ḥusayn.

'*Abbās:* O brother, O Magnificent King, your holy command is fulfilled. The trench is dug.

[*In the enemies' encampment.*]

Ibn Sa'd: According to the order of unjust Ibn Ziyād, the children of the Prophet should burn with thirst.

[*In the encampment of Husayn.*]

Imam: Our enemies know no decency or shame. They have no respect for the Prophet. Full charge ahead, O good brothers. Forward to fight the wicked.

[*In the enemies' encampment.*]

Ibn Sa'd [*addressing his army*]: O wicked, rebellious, sinister group, set fires around the tents of Husayn.

[*In the encampment of Husayn.*]

Zaynab: O God, I am distressed and fearful. They have set fire around the tents. Why is Husayn's encampment on fire? O my hopeless Husayn. O my brave brother 'Abbās.

Imam: O distressed sister with dishevelled hair, why are you crying so loudly? The enemy has not yet removed your veil. By God, your Husayn is still alive.

Shahrbānū: O small flower bud from my garden, why do you look withered? You do not sleep in the cradle, and set fire to my soul. Though you are uncomfortable with the heat and the fever, sleep, my beloved child. O soother of my soul, you are so restless because of thirst.

'*Alī Akbar*: O God, why is Shahrbānū wailing tonight? Her cries reach the skies searing my soul. O sad mother, why are you weeping or mourning? Your Akbar has not yet died.

Shahrbānū: 'Alī Akbar, you know our circumstances and the feeling of the homeless. It is kind of you to visit with the afflicted. O son, 'Alī Asghar has fainted. He may die from thirst. Call in the others.

'*Alī Akbar*: Do not worry, mother, I shall fetch water for him. That

will bring his strength back. Taking courage from his need, I will bring the sweet water for the dear, miserable baby boy.

Shahrbānū: Dear 'Alī, do not venture on to this dangerous and frightful plain. May a thousand Asghars be thy ransom, O handsome boy. I do not want you to go, my dear stalwart boy. I am afraid something may happen to you.

'Alī Akbar: Don't cry, don't wail, don't tear thy ringlets. Dishevel not thy hair. With God's help, I shall bring water presently.

Shahrbānū: O God! Protect my 'Alī Akbar tonight. He is the happiness of my heart and the tranquillity of my soul. O Karbalā', you destroyed my life, and bestowed great oppression and tyranny on your guest.

'Abbās: O Lord, why is Shahrbānū weeping tonight? Her anguish has quickened the heart of men and jinns. O Lady of the Camp, what troubles you tonight? It seems from your anguish that our fate is already sealed.

Shahrbānū: May I be thy ransom, 'Abbās, O Commander of Just People. Why should I not cry? The infant Asghar has no milk and 'Alī Akbar has gone to fetch water. Alas, I am worried that some evil may come upon my darling of Egypt and Canaan [= Joseph].

'Abbās: Do not grieve. Lions' cubs do not fear jackals. I shall go to bring the Moon of Canaan back to you.

'Alī Akbar: O Lord, may I have the luck to bring water for Husayn's children. O garrison guarding the water, disperse, or else I shall send you all to hell. Now 'Alī Akbar has come to fetch water from the Euphrates for the thirsty.

[*At the Euphrates embankment.*]

Ibn Sa'd: Akbar, O King of the deserted ones. Seek no water! This water for you is a rare gem. Tell Husayn the price of this water is to swear allegiance to Yazīd.

'Alī Akbar: God is great! With the help of my grandfather, I shall

make tonight the day of judgement for this infidel group.

Ibn Sa'd: [Text missing; begins 'O group . . .']

'*Alī Akbar*: O water of the Euphrates, have you not a grain of shame? On the day of retribution, Zahra will be weary of you. It is not right, it is not fair for me to drink water while my father thirsts.

Ibn Sa'd: Soldiers, stop this young man from carrying water with him to the tents of Ḥusayn.

[*They fight.*]

'*Alī Akbar*: A thousand thanks, O Lord, for helping me to exit safely. I am not going to be embarrassed in the presence of Shahr-bānū, nor will I be ashamed before Asghar.

[*In the encampment of Ḥusayn.*]

'*Abbās*: Thank God, 'Alī Akbar is safely returning with water. He fought with the charisma of Haydar. I shall intercept him on the way, and conceal myself under a veil in order to test him.

[*Between the two encampments.*]

'*Alī Akbar*: Who are you who blocks the path of the hunting lions?

'*Abbās*: On whose order have you come to the Euphrates at night?

'*Alī Akbar*: I have come to fetch water for the thirsty.

'*Abbās*: Let the thirsty drink blood.

'*Alī Akbar*: Young man, Asghar has no milk to drink and is dying from thirst.

'*Abbās*: Let thirst wither his glowing face.

'*Alī Akbar*: Out of pity I shall not kill you tonight.

'*Abbās*: I have compassion for that water which you are carrying tonight.

[*They fight.*]

'*Alī Akbar*: Young man, you possess the same strength as I.

'*Abbās*: May I be your ransom, you have such strong arms.

'*Alī Akbar*: Your voice sounds familiar to me, Beloved of the universe.

'*Abbās*: I know you. May the world be your ransom.

'*Alī Akbar*: I am Akbar, the son of the King of the people.

'*Abbās*: May my soul be your sacrifice. I am your uncle, 'Abbās.

'*Alī Akbar*: I beg your forgiveness, for I did not know it was you.

'*Abbās*: Young man, may I be your ransom, for I blocked your way in order to test you. Wait a moment, O Light of my tearful eyes, for I shall take the news of your coming back to the tents. Glad tidings, O people of the camp, young and old. Happy 'Alī Akbar has brought water with him.

[*In Husayn's encampment.*]

'*Alī Akbar*: O mother of Asghar, come and take water to the milkless babe. Take water for the weak infant child.

Imam: 'Abbās, go and rest. Rest from the trouble of the day. Gabriel will be watching over me tonight more than even. O sister, go spread bedding for my pure brother. I am overcome with desire to meet my celebrated grandfather.

'*Abbās*: Brother Husayn, my heart flutters and sleep has escaped my eyes. I shall put my sharp sword and my shield under my head lest the wretched enemy should surprise me.

Imam: 'Alī Akbar, this night take off the armour of trouble and pain, take off the sheath of martyrdom. Go to sleep, O Tranquillity of Thy Father's Soul, for tomorrow you shall roll in a sea of blood.

'*Alī Akbar*: O God, how can sleep enter my tearful eyes tonight? I shall put my sharp sword and my shield under my head. O wind, blow a breeze upon my sister Sughra tomorrow, carrying the fragrance of my ringlets, which drip deer musk tonight.

Imam: Come, Qāsim, my precious nephew, tonight I am planning a feast for tomorrow. Sakīna, spread open the bridegroom's bedding like a flower, for tonight I want to keep the image of a groom in my mind.

Qāsim: O God, why is the bride of death my companion tonight? Isn't she aware of the bridegroom's despondent heart? On the wedding night the bridegroom eats sweets, yet tonight sugar tastes bitter in my mouth like snake's venom.

Imam: Zaynab, the enemy seeks war and a crying loneliness is our condition tonight.

Zaynab: Tonight is the night of farewell. O, what loneliness, and the enemy approaches.

Imam: Tonight, 'Abbās' hands are folded beneath his head. O, what loneliness. Tomorrow, they will be cut off like branches from the tree in paradise.

Zaynab: Tonight, I can look at [ʿAlī] Akbar's body. Yet tomorrow I will see this flower chopped into a thousand pieces.

Imam: Tonight, Qāsim is asleep in his bridal chamber, as elegant as a cedar tree. Tomorrow, the hands of injustice and oppression shall turn this chamber black.

Zaynab: Qāsim is sleeping in a sea of light tonight. Tomorrow he'll be wedded to his dark grave.

Imam: Tonight, 'Alī Akbar is in a deep slumber. Tomorrow, he'll be swimming in his blood because of the tyranny of the enemy.

Zaynab: Asghar sleeps in his cradle tonight. Tomorrow he'll rest forever, on his father's shoulders.

Imam: Tonight Sakīna sleeps next to her father. Tomorrow she will be captive and numb in the hands of the enemy.

Zaynab: [Text missing, begins 'Next to . . .']

Imam: Go to sleep, dear sister. I bear witness by the Essence of God that all of us, the male members of the Prophet's household, save the sickly 'Ābid, will be put to death at the hands of the oppressors.

Zaynab [to herself]: Use the opportunity, Zaynab, to pour out that which is in your heart. Sit alone and wail over your luck. O depressed Zaynab, be ready for catastrophe and think sometimes about Damascus and sometimes about Kūfa, and sometimes about Karbalā'. O Morning Wind, my patience is finished. O breeze, blow to Najaf and to Medīna. Tell Zahra of our misfortunes. O Zaynab, omit these long complaints.

'Abbās: Arise, 'Abbās. Keep watch over the women's quarters. This is no time for sleep for Zaynab's heart is heavy with pain, Husayn is asleep, and the enemy lurks in the dark. It is time to keep watch. It is the final sleep. O God, grant respite for Zaynab, respite for the helpless, homeless Zaynab. She will ride dishevelled and the sound of music will rise in the air. In her forlornness, no hand will stretch toward her. 'Abbās should die for you. O Father, O 'Alī, we have come from Medīna to your neighbourhood and this is only a short distance from your grave [=Najaf]. O my crowned Father, 'Alī, conquerer of Khaybar, come to Karbalā' and look upon us, forlorn ones.

The Veiled Amīr: I am here, I am here. I have just arrived. My dear, I heard your call in paradise.

'Abbās: I smell the pleasant perfume of ambergris. Is this Jacob leading the lost Joseph or is it a harbinger of good news arriving from Canaan? I cannot take my eyes away from him, although a shaft of light penetrates my eyes from him. Who are you, o Unparalleled Apparition?

The Veiled Amīr: God created me, yet I am Lord of the universe.

'Abbās: Do not advance any further.

The Veiled Amīr: How will you stop me, O lion?

'Abbās: Fear my sword and remain where you are.

The Veiled Amīr: I fear no one save my Creator.

'Abbās: My sharp sword will knock your head off.

The Veiled Amīr: Bravo to you, O One of good repute.

'Abbās: For what reason, O Illustrious One?

The Veiled Amīr: For your loyalty to your brother.

'*Abbās*: How do you know that I have a brother?

The Veiled Amīr: I know you, O Splendid Bird of Paradise.

'*Abbās*: Your voice is familiar to me.

The Veiled Amīr: Yes, and I am disturbed over your becoming marked for death.

'*Abbās*: What brings you to do this blood-thirsty desert?

The Veiled Amīr: I am concerned about six of my brave sons.

'*Abbās*: Name them with dignity.

The Veiled Amīr: One looks like you.

'*Abbās*: Cite his name, O King of the People.

The Veiled Amīr: Know that his good name is 'Abbās.

'*Abbās*: And tell me the name of that one who is the Light of my eyes.

The Veiled Amīr: He is the leader and the elder. He is Ḥusayn.

'*Abbās*: Are you the King of the two worlds?

The Veiled Amīr: And are you Ḥusayn's standard-bearer?

'*Abbās*: I am the servant of the King of religion.

The Veiled Amīr: I am Amīr al-Mu'minīn [=the Prince of the Faithful, 'Alī].

'*Abbās*: Greetings, O afflicted Crowned Father.

The Veiled Amīr: Greetings to you, memory of my youth.

'*Abbās*: Where have you been, dear Father, in this dark night?

The Veiled Amīr: Coming to you in suffering from Najaf to Karbalā'.

'*Abbās*: Why is your back, which was straight as an elegant cypress, bent now?

The Veiled Amīr: From the sorrow for you who are marked for death.

'Abbās: Why have you fallen into such suffering?

The Veiled Amīr: From my separation from Kulthūm and Zaynab.

'Abbās: What do you carry beneath your robe, O Unparalleled One?

The Veiled Amīr: There is water here for Sakīna.

'Abbās: Have you an order for your son, 'Abbās?

The Veiled Amīr: Go and rest. Sleep in your bed.

'Abbās: I shall obey your orders, but I shall sleep with tearful eyes.

[*In the enemies' encampment.*]

Ibn Sa'd: It is spring and the flowers are blossoming. Be happy and cheerful for a while, Ibn Sa'd. O Lord, make this royal appointment arrive as soon as possible.

Shimr: I have just arrived from Kūfa with a large army. I have come with a royal appointment for Ibn Sa'd. Woe to the sleepers of the Azure Valley who are unaware of the injustices of Fate. How scented is this land, how great is the feast in the desert. Has the navel-pouch of the musk-deer fallen on this plain? Has Solomon spread a feast in this land? Shimr, beware, you are crossing the lion's lair. The fierceness of the lions will shake your being. Are you not aware that 'Abbās is the hand of the Hand of God? Who can tie God's Hands? Where are you going to hide when the son of Haydar mounts his swift horse? I will tie the graceful hands and feet of the unfortunate Qāsim. When 'Alī Akbar wakes up the hearts of all the warriors will tremble but I shall attack and send smoke from Husayn's tent to the planet Saturn. Hark, I hear sounds coming from Ibn Sa'd's encampment. The sound of a flute mixed with that of a lute. Sweet singing voices are rising toward Saturn from the tents of Ibn Sa'd. Well, well, what is the cause of your celebration? Have you defeated the brave enemy? Has the Prophet's progeny been killed? Tell the cup-bearer not to deny

wine to the drunkards. Unless a good Fate assists you, you will be foolishly pounding on an anvil with your hands.

Ibn Sa'd: O Shimr, be not so hot-headed, listen with your heart and soul to my advice. Husayn, the son of Zahra is the righteous Imam. Why must you stab him with your sharp dagger? You think that after killing Husayn, the son of 'Alī, you will receive the governorship of Ray and Gurgan. After Husayn's death you will have not a single grain from Ray, and your body will be burned in hot fire. The feast has been prepared for us, so let's enjoy the musicians' music.

Shimr: O commander, your words have touched me, penetrating my heart like small arrows. Setting foot upon this earth is like giving up my life. How can one chain the hand of God? If I destroy the house of my endurance, even a hundred Abu Turabs could not rebuild it.

Ibn Sa'd: O Shimr, the royal edicts have been issued in your name, and the Ruler has empowered you to govern the Arabs and the Persians. Your service must be superb or else there will be no gold, no silver, and no money. O you infidel, why did the evil infidel send you to the battlefield? Do not trespass the line of justice and do not kill the sacred prey. I do not advise you to go to war. Do not fight but make peace, do not harm the King of the people. The world became a flower garden by their blessed coming and made the life of friends joyful. Now I am speaking to the owner of the coffee house—give sweet tea to Shimr Zuljushan.¹¹

Shimr: Why are you so lax, Ibn Sa'd?

Ibn Sa'd: Patience is necessary in this affair.

Shimr: How long must we be patient? Power and position are at stake.

Ibn Sa'd: Well said. It is time to think about victory and defeat.

Shimr: Men must be guided by sages. You give the orders.

¹¹ The play must have been performed in a coffee-house, and the actor playing the rôle of Ibn Sa'd makes this remark on purpose so that the audience will remember that they are only actors, not real villains.

[*Ibn Sa'd gestures without answering.*]

Shimr: The love for the world fills my heart with infidelity to my faith.

Ibn Sa'd: What should be done? Say it, thinking of the day of retribution.

Shimr: Why did you come to Karbalā' with horses and an army?

Ibn Sa'd: Why did you come with sword, dagger and spear?

Shimr: You signed the order to kill 'Alī's household.

Ibn Sa'd: You light the fire of fighting and war.

Shimr: You heard the name Ray and said, 'I have got my wish.'

Ibn Sa'd: Why did you accept the robe of honour from Ibn Ziyād?

Shimr: I wear the robe of honour, and I take the consequences.

Ibn Sa'd: Like you, I have given up my conscience and my religion.

Shimr: This futile talk stems from fear.

Ibn Sa'd: Do you know that our opponent is 'Alī's 'Abbās?

Shimr: And do you know that our army consists of lion hunters?

Ibn Sa'd: Do you realize that the Banī Hāshim are very brave and strong?

Shimr: Do you know that 'Abbās is related to me?

Ibn Sa'd: So what! You should know that 'Abbās will not befriend us.

Shimr: I'll deceive him, I'll make him desert Ḥusayn.

Ibn Sa'd: It can not be so; he is a lion and he is loyal.

Shimr: Then what can we do about Yazīd's command and decree?

Ibn Sa'd: I am in despair and pessimistic concerning anything in the world.

Shimr: I will have to tie their hands, or else they will tie mine.

Ibn Sa'd: I will have to break hearts or else my own heart will be broken.

Shimr: I will have to set heads upon spears or lose my own.

Ibn Sa'd: I will have to face the battle or else I shall have to run away in disgrace.

Shimr: Go, rest, and be aware of what goes on.

Ibn Sa'd: Go, brief the army and strengthen their morale.

Shimr: You go and order them to beat the drums of war.

Ibn Sa'd: Drummers, beat the drums till the sound of drums reaches the ninth heaven. And you, Shimr, go and talk to 'Abbās.

Shimr: O Ibn Sa'd, I am going to talk to brave 'Abbās, to make peace tonight. Or else in the morning I'll make him swim in his blood. What's the hurry, damned Shimr? Is my luck sleeping? Why is my mind and heart so tense and disturbed tonight? I need wine to soothe my nerves. Don't go, there is danger on the way. Turn around for the province of Ray is what counts.

[*At the perimeter of Husayn's encampment.*]

Shimr: For God's sake, answer me, 'Abbās. Either give me the answer or be ready for the battle. Nights like these are not for sleeping. He is not visible to me even as the sun in the night. The darkness of the night brings my love to the surface. Love induces different aims in each person. As for me, I am captured by the promise of the prince of darkness.

[*to his Damascene dagger*]

It is time for you to spill blood. Come out of thy scabbard, O crescent moon! If my sword fails to conquer during the battle, and my dagger fails to cut the throat of the Imam, the son of the Imam, then let us have peace, and I am for war. If you want peace I am for war, if you seek it I see a holy ghost standing guard. Whose tent is that? My humble intelligence can not describe his attributes, and how could I? Can an ant describe the attributes of the kingly Imam? O King of the universe, sublime Prince 'Abbās, come out of your royal camp.

[*In the encampment of Husayn.*]

'Abbās: Someone has been calling me from the left and from the right. He calls my name and by this name he seeks to disgrace himself and achieve fame. People have forsaken Husayn for Yazīd—I am afraid they will all become idolators. Why does this upside-down world not come to an end? The exalted are cursed and the mean are revered. Arise! The earth is filled with calamity and sedition. Straighten your back and observe the tumult behind the tents. O 'Alī Akbar, the beautiful cypress of Husayn, and Qāsim, the candle in his gloomy nights, rise up and hold your swords to watch over his camp for the breeze wafts the smell of blood from the plain.

Shimr: Greetings to you, who are praised by God day and night.

'Abbās: Someone has called me by name from a distance. What is your auspicious command, O Exalted One? Who are you who has been calling my name from afar? Who are you who is thundering behind the tents?

[*At the perimeter.*]

Shimr: O standard-bearer of Husayn, King of Karbalā', be well. Salutations! O Commander of the opposing army, be well! I am eagerly awaiting you. Welcome and be merry for a feast has been prepared in your honour. The golden torches were set up in your honour. It is light from the earth to the sky. I am at your service, O 'Abbās. Give orders to this worthless servant of yours.

[*In the encampment of Husayn.*]

'Abbās: Who is it that is praising me? Who is it that pretends to guide me? And who is the man who is trying to trick me? How can I welcome the standard-bearer of the villain? If you want to approach the tent of 'Abbās, then you want to be cloven in half—so come forward.

Shimr: O beautiful and radiant Prince, for me you hold the rank of a King and the Ruler of the Earth. You are as magnificent as

Solomon! I am only a weak ant. The learned and the laymen both call me Shimr, but I am only a beggar at your court.

'Abbās: O filthy, ugly, atheistic oppressor, I do not wish to see your sinister face. Robber of faith, outcast of the faithful, I have no business with you. I serve the people and the religion. You are the enemy of Husayn, I am the slave in his service. It is clear what you are. It is clear what I am.

Shimr: O King, my head and soul are under your feet: so much so that I am ready to fight for you. I carry an order from Yazīd appointing you commander of the army. Let me fight at your side.

'Abbās: Do not abuse my name in front of my noblemen, for as long as I have my head and soul I shall sacrifice myself for the beloved together with many of my companions.

Shimr: Why do you cast aside the generous decree of the King of Syria? One who walks should look in front lest he fall into a hole. O semblance of 'Alī, haven't you heard that a tiny mosquito can kill an elephant? You boast, saying that you are Husayn's servant. But remember how much Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, and that the villain Cain killed his brother because he had a grudge. Moses was a righteous prophet but he let his people suffer thirst. Desert thy brother so that pain and sorrow will desert you. Come to our army, and accept its command.

'Abbās: O Disgraced One, you know nothing of Abel's status. You are trying to make me look like Cain. Haven't you heard the Qur'ānic verse about sacrifice? Can you not distinguish between that and the story of Cain? If you are not aware of the high rank of the descendants of 'Alī, then read the revelations of the Qur'ān. The Creator out of his munificence has bestowed upon us Salsabīl, Kawthar, the Euphrates, and the Nile as a dowry. Stop this nonsense, O Rude One, for I can not forsake [Husayn]. Your attempt to mislead me is like Satan's attempt to deceive Ishmael inside the Ka'ba.

Shimr: It is not without reason that I, Shimr, came on such a dark

night. Otherwise it is not a good time to visit a friend. The love for a kinsman stirred my heart. The one who does not fall in love in spring is not a man. A plant that does not sprout at Nowrūz is nothing but firewood.

'Abbās: It is the insult to Ḥusayn in your talk and not the affront to politeness that shocks me. The sacrifice of 'Alī Akbar makes me hot with anger at you. This is a great and serious matter.

Shimr: Pledge allegiance to Yazīd and rescue yourself from death. Better to be a commander than to die in your own blood. Listen to my advice, my words are as precious as pearls. One should not tell the words reserved for a friend to a stranger. Nor should one complain about a friend to an enemy.

'Abbās: Look at Ḥusayn. Destiny is pulling him towards his end and he cannot hide his feelings. He laments the forthcoming captivity of his loved ones, he grieves the imminent death of 'Alī Akbar.

Shimr: Let me give you a word of advice, don't consider it wrong. The flower's freshness lies in the Zephyr wind. Caging nightingales in the season of roses and tulips is nothing but persecution. No one loves you as much as I do. You are like the sun.

'Abbās: Listen to the children, to their burning, torrid groans. Turmoil rules this plain. What religion allows such oppression upon Ḥusayn's children? Do not think that Ḥusayn, the Cypress, is trembling because of a Zephyr wind, but because he hears the nightingales [= his children] moan.

Shimr: Be Yazīd's ally from the bottom of your heart and take command of the Syrian army. Save me from turbulent fear for you. Following Ḥusayn is a hope built on credit. Do not exchange cash for credit. Forget the promise of paradise. Fight not, make peace, save your life; one should not let an opportunity go by.

'Abbās: I have taken an eternal oath to submit my life, to set my body upon the edge of a sword and a spear. This blaze is like

that set upon Abraham. The love of God permeates me so give me no advice. No physician has a remedy for love. Your path is a dead end, a path full of sin. May arrows pierce me if I close my eyes on Husayn. Keep away, for your words have boiled my blood. Your malicious company sets a terrible torture upon my soul.

Shimr: We came to this plain upon the King's orders with the army and its commanders. By God, there are no virtuous men in the army. We rested during the day while the sun was up. We have come at night to see the Moon [= 'Abbās]. Join us and become the commander of our army. We have come a long way to see you.

'Abbās: We are here on this plain not to seek glory. We have been forced to take refuge here. We are here neither to fight nor to make peace. We are servants and lovers of the King, Husayn. We have come from Hijaz to the banks of the Euphrates standing firmly beside Husayn. We are here to enforce our rights.

Shimr: O excellent one, I am disappointed in you. I am Shimr with a thousand things on my mind. If Husayn is right and born right then I have a quarrel with truth itself. From dusk to dawn, from Kūfa to Damascus, I am being endlessly taunted. How much patience do you think I have? Don't fight against me.

'Abbās: I am a lion, and my neck is chained by love. I am firm in my love for my beloved. I am a lion and the heir of the Lion of God [= 'Alī]. I have no dispute with foxes like you. Get away, O chosen disciple of Satan. I have no desire to carry on a discussion with you.

Shimr: A wise man would not touch a lancet. You are walking into a ditch of trouble. Being on the opposite side from you breaks my back, although I am as strong as a mountain. Have mercy upon Sakīna's thirsty lips. She will die of thirst on the banks of the Euphrates.

'Abbās: Sakīna's thirst breaks my heart and your futile speech sets fire to my mind. O impudent oppressor, depart, or else I shall

break your ugly mouth with a punch and cover your body with blood and dust.

Shimr: We are related on my mother's side. Let the Eternal Judge be my witness. As a fasting man awaits a signal of the end of the fast, I am awaiting your expression of allegiance to Yazīd.

'Abbās: On this journey, the only thing on my mind is Ḥusayn. I am among people, but my mind is somewhere else. I can not stop frequenting the court of the king of the universe, Ḥusayn. There is fortune in his service and salvation at his door. O bastard, what is your religion that our blood is sweeter to you than the milk of your mother?

Shimr: Are you not withdrawing from the prime of your life? Do not give up the riches of the world for the sake of one brother. A man's life is short. Come with me and I shall show you a carefree life full of pleasure and luxury. O Lord, I am your slave—be my master.

'Abbās: When I ride my horse on the day of battle, I shall smash the warriors' heads and I shall paint the sharp side of my Ḥaydarī sword purple with blood. Get away or your body will become the target of my sword.

Shimr: Do not be perturbed, O son of the Arab Amīr, whale of the Red Sea, warrior of all the Arab territories. Look at my sword. It has defeated Kurds and Zābūlis, yet I stand before you obsequiously.

'Abbās: Talk nonsense no more, rude, damned one. Do not count yourself equal among us. Your father is a Syrian and mine is Arab. You have no status. Get away or you'll be the target of my sword.

Shimr: You are the flame of the tribe's candle for you are related to me through your beautiful mother. Do not pride yourself on being Ḥusayn's water-carrier. I have got for you a letter to glory. Your humiliation is my disgrace and your suffering is my shame.

'Abbās: How could there be another Murteżā? The sky would never

dream of another woman such as Fāṭima. I live in the shadow of my brother, the King of religion. Shame upon me if I desert Ḥusayn. Get away or else your body will be the target of my sword.

Shimr: Do not be perturbed, do not kick thy servant from your door.

'Abbās: This is all deceit, this is all a trick, I know it.

Shimr: I am Shimr; I have come to make you aware of what is good and what is bad for you.

'Abbās: What is the enemy preparing? I shall take out my spear.

Shimr: Do not boil with rage. I am your guest and my heart palpitates.

'Abbās: Isn't it Ḥusayn who is your guest, whose wife sleeps thirsty?

Shimr: Greetings to you from Kūlī b. Sa'd Azraq.

'Abbās: What do they have to say to 'Abbās, o persecutor?

Shimr: They offer you lands in Ray, Rūm, Farang and China.

'Abbās: For what purpose? For what reason? Say, infidel.

Shimr: To forsake Ḥusayn, and become the commander of his enemies.

'Abbās: God forbid, God forbid. Shut your mouth, O cruel oppressor.

Shimr: You are alone and Ḥusayn is alone. One flower does not make a spring.

'Abbās: The love of Ḥusayn, the son of the Prophet, is priceless to me.

Shimr: Sit happily on the throne and I shall stand guard.

'Abbās: Seeing handsome Qāsim makes me happy.

Shimr: Come to my side and become the leader.

'Abbās: I feel ashamed for Sakīna's thirst.

Shimr: Come to my side and I'll fill your saddle with gold.

'Abbās: I'd rather die than see my sister, Zaynab, handcuffed.

Shimr: Are you willing to see Kulthūm held in disrespect and homeless?

'Abbās: I am willing to see her weep upon my grave.

Shimr: I'll give you so much gold and gems, you won't be able to count them.

'Abbās: And what shall I answer my father, 'Alī?

Shimr: Say, 'I am sorry, it was for law and order.'

'Abbās: I'll be ashamed in front of Fāṭima on the Day of Judgement.

Shimr: You do not appreciate the monarchy, my dear.

'Abbās: A sage man does not do something that he will regret.

Shimr: Listen carefully, peace is better than war.

'Abbās: For me, life is a disgrace without the Prince of Religion.

Shimr: You can not rival such an army, O second Haydar.

'Abbās: I shall destroy Kūfa as easily as Khaybar.

Shimr: Innumerable soldiers will come from Kūfa, Syria, and Aleppo.

'Abbās: And 'Abbās will face them all like a formidable lion.

Shimr: Your scimitar shakes the skies. Angels are the slaves of your court. I pray that nothing wrong comes to you. I owe so much to your old mother. I can't be ungrateful to her. For the last time I say come to us or you shall be killed. Your end will come soon.

'Abbās: Shame be on you, ungrateful one. Why have you obliterated all respect for 'Alī's household? We don't need your kindness, O impudent snob. On the day of war I will not ask for your help. Let your army roll in today until the end of the world. Let them fill the space from east to west, from the sky to

the fish [= the fish which holds the earth]. They will all be broken like a small bristle by the scimitar of 'Abbās.

Shimr: I am your slave, ready to sacrifice myself. I have a command from Yazīd, my lord. I am the son of Zal, Rustam. I am the warrior Afrāsiyāb. Like Fārāmarz, I am the champion of the army. I am a temple, I am a convent, a priest, a monk, a Zangi. I closed the book on 'Uthmān, I am a wall of iron. Woe to the time when my horse is saddled and I enter the stage of war. Neither the enemy's horse nor the rider shall last long fighting me. Now, hear more: I am a rogue and a thief. I steal people's collyrium from their eyes. I am Satan's guide and preceptor. I am the teacher of that wicked creature. Seven hundred and seventy followers learned from me. I know the mysteries of all nations. Only one equals me in knowledge, I am the mufti, I am graceful, I am a sage; I may be doomed to burn in hell, but I can raise hell in Karbalā'. I am an old dragon, a scorpion, a goat, a snake. Sometimes I am thunder, sometimes lightning, sometimes fire, sometimes soft, sometimes cold, sometimes burning like fire, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes as black as a snake. At times I am sweet as sugar and at times I am bitter as venom. I am the enemy of God, His Prophet, and Murteza. I am not the victim of oppression in the catastrophe at Karbalā'. I am the oppressor. You may think I am a grocer from Damascus or a haberdasher from Zangibar or India or one of those filthy mouse-eating Arabs. I am your enemy, the seed of menses, traitors and adulterers. I have seven breasts just like a dog.

[*The actor tries to protect himself against the audience to prove that he himself is not Shimr, whom he hates.*]

I am the rôle-carrier of Shimr and the invoker of the King of religion, Husayn. I hate Shimr, that son of a bitch.

'Abbās: O shameless bastard and impudent son of damned Zuljūsafin, I swear by the great God, His prophet, and by the broken heart of the pure Zahra that no matter what their number, no matter where they come from, even if the sand of the desert or the leaves of the trees turn into armies of the foe, I will not be afraid or alarmed. I will draw my sword, call

Haydar's name and attack your armies. O outcast on the Day of Judgement, I swear by the hands of Ḥusayn's standard-bearer, which are the hands of 'Alī. Who can equal God's hands? O damned people. When I put my feet in the stirrups and mount my horse, I will not take off my boots nor shall I remove the helmet of bravery and zeal. I shall not unfasten the lion's armour from my back until I have had justice from the people of oppression and evil. Then I shall ride to Syria where I shall unseat the damnable adulterer, the cruel, oppressive son of the cannibal Hind, from his throne. I shall lead him on a leash in public and make him run after a horse. I shall humiliate him to the fullest and bring him to the bench of the honourable judge Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Abī Ṭālib. All the people shall know that courage such as this is not characteristic of ordinary men except for Abū 'l-Faḏl, the standard-bearer, who is the water-carrier of Ḥusayn's orphans. I will be proud of myself before the jinn and angels because of this great achievement. If the purpose were not Ḥusayn's martyrdom I would get permission from him to use my sharp sword to strike terror in Karbalā' in such a way that nothing would grow from now to eternity for a friend or foe. But what can I do? If I do not immolate myself for the followers of my father, who will become the intercessor for this poor nation of sinners? I swear by God that I have accepted to die, and have my head raised upon spears. I shall be grateful for God's mercy. Go, O son of Satan. Boasting to 'Abbās, from now until the day of judgement, will do you no good.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'From what . . .']

'Abbās: I am a pearl from the sea of *wilāyat*. I am a lion and the son of the Lion of God. O inferior oppressor, Karbalā' alone can not frighten me. Even if you fill the universe with soldiers I will not fear them. I will fight all of them and corner them. I will erase the name of Yazīd, that infidel dog, from the face of the earth. I will throw him in the dust and humiliate him! But what can I do? The Shī'a are sinners and need Ḥusayn's intercession. O friends of Ḥusayn, cry out 'O 'Alī!'

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'O friends . . .']

[*In the encampment of Husayn.*]

'Alī Akbar: O God, what is happening on this plain of calamity? There is turmoil on the plain of Karbalā'. This night, the spiteful enemy has launched a surprise attack on us. With no water in my throat, I am going to fight the deceitful foe on this miserable plain. Bless me, should I die, my dear father Husayn.

Qāsim: O God, what is happening on this plain of calamity? There is turmoil on the plain of Karbalā'. This night the spiteful enemy has launched a surprise attack on us. With no water in my throat, I am going to fight the deceitful foe on this miserable plain. Bless me, should I die, my dear uncle Husayn.

Sakīna: O Lord, has the world come to an end? Have the wheels of the universe stopped turning? O uncle, standard-bearer of Karbalā', get up and take a look at us. I see the standard but not the standard-bearer. Aunt Zaynab, homeless Zaynab, wake up, wake up, wake up. The cruel enemy surrounds the camp. Wake up, wake up.

Zaynab: O, sweet singing nightingale, why are you wailing in the middle of the night? Why are you sighing so desperately from your heart? Has fire kindled your soul? Why are you wailing in the middle of the night?

Sakīna: Come, O aunt, observe the turmoil and listen to the enemy's drums beating. I have no desire to live. Wake up my father.

Zaynab: Zaynab is distressed. Has her luck turned away from her? Prepare yourself for captivity. The confusion and uproar is coming from the enemy. Zaynab will certainly be taken prisoner. Wake up brother. Wake from your restful sleep and look into Zaynab's tearful eyes.

Imam: You interrupted my dream of a musk-scented paradise. You interrupted my conversation with my father and grandfather. I heard my mother's voice saying, 'Husayn will be our guest tomorrow night.' You interrupted my dream about my brother.

Zaynab: O companion of my sad heart, the enemy has penetrated

the camp. You can hear the beating of the drums of war by the despicable enemy. Listen, O brother, for I am going to be taken into captivity.

'Abbās: I call upon you, Qāsim and Akbar. Roar the thunderous cry 'Allāhu akbar.'

Imam: Call 'Abbās, my close companion and great and gallant warrior.

Zaynab [entering the tent of 'Abbās]: 'Abbās, O brother, light of Ḥaydar's eyes, the dearest offspring of the Prophet is calling you. I see the standard, but I do not see the standard-bearer. Maybe he has deserted us.

Imam: Do not wail, dear sister. Hurry, and send 'Alī Akbar to me.

Zaynab [entering the tent of 'Alī Akbar]: Akbar, my darling, open your eyes. Fear makes my bones tremble. Open your eyes. Alas, o brother, there is no sign of 'Alī Akbar. Where has he gone? My sweet 'Alī Akbar?

Imam: Do not wail, do not weep, do not groan. Go, call the light of Hassan's eyes to my presence.

Zaynab [entering the tent of Qāsim]: O tranquillity of my soul, O sweet Qāsim, wake up. Alas, O my brother Qāsim is not in his bed either. Fate has turned against us.

Imam: O sister, gather all the children and sit in the tents. I shall look for 'Abbās and Akbar so that I can thwart the army of darkness. O brave brother 'Abbās, standard-bearer of my army, and 'Alī Akbar, my son, where have you gone?

[sees 'Abbās]

O 'Abbās, where have you been? Without you I am helpless.

'Abbās: O mighty King, joy of Faṭīma, greetings to you. Why do you hang your head? Why are you so sad? Are you thinking about martyrdom?

Imam: O light of my tearful eyes, greetings to you. Joy of my heart and my soul, greetings. Your absence in the encampment

distressed me. I had to guard it alone against the infidel villain.

'Abbās: Know, dear Brother, that in the middle of the night Shimr Zuljūshān came to my tent. His words set fire to my heart and finally I chased him away with my sword.

Imam: I have heard that the commander of the enemy gave a written decree of amnesty to Shimr to deliver it to you. Go ahead, deny your brotherhood with the prophet's heir. Tell that helpless Zaynab she is not your sister. You need not help me, the forlorn one. 'Alī Akbar suffices for martyrdom with us. Go and save yourself, and God be with you.

'Abbās: O friends, what should I do with my shame? Ḥusayn has discharged me from his service. My sword and dagger are useless except in the service of my brother. If you, Ḥusayn, are not my protector I have no use for my helmet. I shall go barefoot to do homage to my father's grave.¹² Where shall I turn for friends? O people, I am abandoned! Ḥusayn had discharged me from his service—I am abandoned. O cruel Karbalā', where is thy hospitality? O earth, I shall bury my head in your bosom for I have no mother to lean on. O Zephyr wind, blow on Medīna and tell my mother that I have been abandoned. I am without friends or family. The forlorn are buried without a shroud or camphor, and they take their dreams and hopes to their graves with them. How awful it is to die in a strange land. O dear Sakīna, my niece, be my intercessor with Ḥusayn. Go to your father and implore him on my behalf and tell him, 'O father, my uncle seems abandoned by family and friends. He is alone.'

Sakīna: O matchless uncle, why are you crying? May Sakīna be your sacrifice. O uncle, do you want Ḥusayn's head mounted upon a spear? I am distraught. Do you know what you have done? Uncle, you broke your promise to my father. You conversed with the damnable Shimr. You broke my father's back.

¹² I.e., to 'Alī's grave, so that his spirit might mollify Ḥusayn.

'Abbās: Come here, dear niece. Come close, O broken-hearted one. Sit on my lap like a flower. Your sorrow has set me on fire. Your face is pale as the moon from thirst and there are fever blisters upon your lips. I am the water-carrier and it shames me. There is nothing I can do. Blood runs down my eyes from sorrow. Husayn is friendless and weary, a stranger in a sea of infidels. His young men will all die and Qāsim shall wear a shroud instead of wedding garments. After I die the spring of our lives will dry up as in autumn and the world will succumb to the terror of our enemies. They will show their wickedness and set fire to our tents. I grieve for you, for they will burn your clothes and chain your arms and laugh at your cries and slap your beautiful face. Where will I be at that hour, to take revenge upon these infidels, to save you from evil?

[*There is a pause.*]

O Husayn, to whose court angels come in need, no one has ever dismissed a servant such as 'Abbās from his court. If you are ashamed of me as a brother, take me as a servant, do not think that I am the darling of Medīna. Don't send me away from your blessed presence. It would be the greatest disloyalty to leave you. Take the standard away from me and give it to 'Alī Akbar and let him be your standard-bearer instead of me.

Imam: Don't say these words, O 'Abbās. You are my most respected brother, O 'Abbās. Do you want to make me sad? Go say farewell to the distressed Zaynab.

'Abbās: For the sake of the martyrs, I beg forgiveness from whomever I made unhappy or injured on this journey. Pretend it never happened.

Zaynab: O joy of my youth and the cane of my old age. You're going now, and by God my captivity will come true. My humiliation will be a guarantee of your eternal life.

'Abbās: Alas, from now on it will not be possible for us any more to go from Hijaz to Medīna, in glorious grandeur, so that I could carry the flag in front of your camel all the way to the Prophet's grave.

Zaynab: I swear by my mother's and father's graves that you and Husayn are one and the same to me. Don't think, O brother, that I consider myself your equal. I am your servant. I swear it on Zahra's grave.

'Abbās: Please do not say these words. You are the lady of Husayn's camp and I am his obedient servant. I, the despondent one, am not your brother but the humblest of your slaves.

Zaynab: From the Prophet I heard that you would die as a martyr in Karbalā'. Now that I shall not be permitted to see your noble face again, allow me to kiss your hand.

'Abbās: Lucky is he who has a mother in a strange land—if not a mother, at least a sister. Come, sister, hear my last will. Let me tell you my last wishes. Take care of Umm Kulthūm. Wherever there is a mourning ceremony take her along. If by chance you journey to your home town, tell my old lonely mother that if she has not been pleased with her 'Abbās up to his time, she should not be sad, since he has redeemed himself; she should be proud. If you see the bride-to-be of the martyr Akbar, my little daughter Sughayra, tell her I am sorry I did not arrange and see her wedding to Akbar. There will be three signs of my bitter death. Hear them from me, mournful sister. The first one is when the flag falls and the enemy shall sigh with relief. They will say, 'Husayn has lost his brother.' The second is when the oppressors cut off my hands from both arms. The third is when you hear my cry. Then cry out, 'O God, save him!' Then, my despondent sister, you must drag my body away, for I have a countless number of enemies. My pure body will be covered by myriads of wounds. When they take you to Damascus, they'll show you the martyrs first. Prince Akbar's mother will embrace her son's corpse. Sakīna will cry for her father until she loses her mind. Don't leave me alone in the midst of the martyrs. Tell [Umm] Kulthūm to dishevel her hair and wail for me. O sister of the King of Martyrs, wrap me in a shroud with your own hands. I do not want the enemy to see my defiled and camphorless body. The enemy may think I am an orphan who has nothing but tears in his eyes. There is no more time, sister, forgive me, forgive me. Farewell.

Zaynab: O God, O Just One, I wish that no sister would ever witness her brother's death. Your departure, O brother, breaks my back and ties me in chains of distress. O Just One, who has seen a sister wrap a shroud around her brother? One who has no brother is like a bird with no wings.

Sakīna [*hallucinating*]: O Commander-in-chief of this meagre army, o Crowned uncle, Standard-bearer of the King of the universe, my Prince, do you remember when your daughter, my rose-checked cousin, became the betrothed of 'Alī Akbar? What a splendid wedding, what a magnificent celebration. Medīna was lit with the flames of my sigh. Let me kiss your hand and be your sacrifice. I am thirsty, uncle, very thirsty. I am dying from thirst, my mournful soul is leaving me. [*she faints.*]

'*Abbās*: O, Sakīna, why have you fainted? I am ashamed to look at your beautiful face. Let me be your sacrifice. I nurtured you and fostered you and worried about you. O Light of my eyes, I shall get permission from Husayn to fight. Either I lose my hands and die or I will fetch water for you. Brother Husayn, how long should I witness so much pain and sorrow? How long should I stand ashamed before your daughter? Sakīna needs water. Give me permission to go and fight and challenge the swords of the enemy. O dear brother, may God protect you and keep all calamities away from you.

Imam: It is very hot, O 'Abbās, as on the Day of Resurrection. You are the water-carrier. Go find water for the orphans.

'*Abbās*: Tell that rancorous Shimr, that Godless man, that 'Abbās, Husayn's servant, is calling him.

Shimr: [*Text missing, begins 'What . . .'*]

[*On the battlefield.*]

'*Abbās*: The children are crying from thirst. I have come to fetch water for them.

Shimr: [*Text missing, starts 'If . . .'*]

'*Abbās*: O possessor of Zulfaqar, it is time for help. O father of the eleven imāms, it is the time for help.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'Friends . . .']

'*Abbās*: O Euphrates, thou art pleasant but unfaithful. Why art thou distant from the thirsty lips of Ḥusayn?

[In Ḥusayn's encampment.]

Sakīna: Come, uncle, hurry up! Fill your water pouch with water! Help us! Come, uncle! Bring water!

[On the battlefield.]

'*Abbās*: Go to the tents, to the king of Karbalā'. Arrange for my mourning. Go to the tents.

[In Ḥusayn's encampment.]

Sakīna: I do not need water, uncle, I need you. I must talk to you. Come, uncle, come!

[On the battlefield.]

Shimr: O soldiers, do not allow 'Abbās to take water to the tents of the King of the Universe.

[They fight.]

O Ḥusayn, I have cut off your standard-bearer's hand. O Ḥusayn, I have finished him on the battleground.

'*Abbās* [to the audience]: When you are powerless then invoke 'Alī. My right hand has fallen from my body. O God, let my left hand be at Ḥusayn's service: I have yet a left hand. What a pity, one hand can not clap.

[In Ḥusayn's encampment.]

Imam: I hear a thunderous wailing, 'I lost my hand.' It comes from my water-carrier.

[On the battlefield.]

Shimr: Weep and mourn in Karbalā', for I have cut off 'Abbās's left

hand. O standard-bearer of the believers, 'Abbās, remember when I asked you to forsake Ḥusayn. You said, 'God forbid.' Tell Sakīna that water is on its way so that she will stop her wailing.

Zaynab: [Text missing, begins 'Your hand . . .']

Shimr [to 'Abbās]: Come, O infidel army, gather around the standard-bearer of the Lonely King. My name is Ḥakam, 'Abbās's murderer. I shall smash his brain with my club. 'Abbās, profess your faith before I cut off your head and separate it from your body.

'Abbās: Alas, my two hands fell from my body; they were my wings. Alas, Ḥusayn has lost his standard-bearer. Alas, Zaynab will be humiliated by scornful people. She'll be tormented by my death. Alas, my mother does not know that my two hands have been severed from my body. No one could equal me in strength if my hands were still on my arms. In the midst of this tumult and confusion I hope only to get a glimpse of Ḥusayn's face once more. O Ḥusayn, lonely am I. May I be your sacrifice, you are so kind and generous.

[To *Shimr*, not noted in index.]

O cowardly oppressor, accursed one. Where is justice, where is humanity? As long as my hands were mine, you did not speak of taking out my brain. Luck is on your side. Otherwise, I would have clawed your heart out like a lion.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'Give . . .']

'Abbās: O God, Ḥakam's blow has knocked me out. O Ḥusayn, come to my aid, O hope of the Faithful, come and rescue your brother who is soaked in blood.

[*Husayn* rushes towards 'Abbās.]

Imam: O brother 'Abbās, O brother 'Abbās, O brother, put your head in my lap.

'Abbās [hallucinating]: Young man, leave me alone, for God's sake.

Imam: Do not grieve, it is I, Ḥusayn, who has come to your side.

'*Abbās* [to *Shimr*]: Do not cut off my head. Let me see my brother at my side. I am ashamed before *Sakīna*; do not take me to the tents as long as I am conscious. *Sakīna* had wanted water. I can not bring her even a drop.

Imam: O 'Abbās, my brother and the backbone of my army, my friend and the strength of my arms, where is your flag? Where are your hands? O strength of my arms, who has cast an arrow into your eyes? O afflicted one, you are shutting your eyes upon this world and are breaking my heart. My friend, my brother, the strength of my arm, *Sakīna* is restless, sitting and waiting. She said, 'My uncle, bring water.' O God, for the sake of young 'Abbās, I ask you to forgive the sins of all the Shi'a.

THE SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF URDU *MARTHĪYA*

Karrar Husain

Pakistan

THE RITUAL

The Shī'a of South Asia borrowed most of the Muḥarram rites and ceremonies from Iran. But they have been discriminating in their borrowings, and moulded whatever they borrowed according to their genius, developing forms of activity and expression peculiar to themselves. They rejected the Iranian *ta'zīya*, or Passion Play; nor did the graphic representation of the Prophet and His Family find any favor with them.

Of the symbols in the Muḥarram ritual, they developed what they call *ta'zīya*, something very different from the *ta'zīya* of Iran. The South Asian *ta'zīya* is an imitation in an architectural form through whatever medium—it may be wood and paper or any metal or grass and flowers or tender shoots of wheat and barley—of the idea of the mausoleum of the Imam Ḥusayn. This root idea proliferated into myriad shapes, peculiar to each city, and even to each guild. *Ta'zīyas* are meant for just one day's parade along with the 'Ashūrā' processions, to be buried in the earth or thrown into water in the evening—an example of the artist losing himself in the work of art fulfilling itself as an act of worship.

In the field of literature, the glorious achievement of the South Asian Shī'a is the evolution of the Urdu *marthīya* out of the threnodies and dirges on the martyrs of Karbalā' and its final

establishment as one of the most essentially characteristic forms of Urdu poetry.

It may be noted that unlike other centres in the Muslim world, Muḥarram celebrations in South Asia are not exclusively the concern of the Shī'a. The initiative did come from the Shī'a, but the Sunni and even the Hindus take part in Muḥarram celebrations. The *ta'zīyas* are almost all built by the Sunni, and the *marthīya majlis* is not only attended by many Sunni and Hindus, but many Sunni and non-Muslim poets have cultivated this form with high artistic skill and deep devotion.

The Muḥarram celebrations started in the Deccan in the late seventeenth century comprising Roza Khawani (the sad narration of the events of Karbalā') and mourning processions accompanied by dirge chanting and breast beating. It was a popular pageant of sorrow participated in and patronized by the Shī'ī sultans, and one of them, Mohammad Qutub Shah, also composed *marthīyas*, which were simple lyrics of deep lamentation and devotion.

In 18th century Delhi, where Urdu poets like Mir and Sauda were exploring, in a fit of creative energy as it were, the power and virtue of the newly-developed medium of Urdu language, and getting free of the tutelage of the Persian tradition, they experimented with many modes of expression for the *marthīya*, but thematically went little beyond lamentation and devotion.

In the Shī'ī Kingdom of Oudh, it was all different. Lucknow, in the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, was the last refuge of Muslim talent in the troubled world of North India, a spot of light and peace among the lengthening shadows of anarchy, the sophisticated, self-conscious, and very prodigal inheritor of ten centuries of Indo-Muslim culture, not resplendent with the sunset colours of a declining civilization. Lucknow was, like ancient Athens, a closed but complete universe, and the *marthīya*, with its roots deep in popular devotion and its branches absorbing the sunshine of courtly patronage, grew like a hot-house plant into a form of poetry fit to take its place along with tragedy on one hand, and epic on the other.

THE MYTH

The inspirational source of the *marthīya* is, of course, Karbalā', and

there is something so deeply pathetic, so tremendously sublime, and bewilderingly enigmatic about one's perception of Karbalā'! That God's own man, beloved of the Prophet, holding all authority from God, and master of Time and Destiny, the aim and end of Creation, its support and mainstay, the symbol of all that is holy and sacred, the inheritor and custodian of the Prophetic charisma, should meet what looks like total destruction, overwhelmed by forces of darkness in a state of utter helplessness, is not a mere historical event, not even the fall of a house, but almost a cataclysm in the divine order of things. Such ambivalence between the physical and the metaphysical levels of existence cannot fail to strike the deepest chords in man's moral and spiritual constitution and raise questions about the quiddity of divine dispensation and the mystery of human destiny—what a covenant, what fulfillment, what reward.

The matter now passes from the rational to the existential realm, and through the pressure of emotional intensity, it becomes interiorized as experienced reality. And as this experience is shared universally, it becomes part of collective consciousness.

To the startled, kindled imagination, Karbalā' becomes the focal point of human history, all the past leading up to it and all the future—until the Day of Judgement—flowing out of it, a fiery moment in which the beginning of time and the end of time coalesce.

Legends, symbolising the meaning and significance that cannot be expressed through ordinary modes of communication, and which have yet to be expressed (so irrepressible and imperative is the urge) cluster around the fact. This constellation of legends forms a sort of myth (*mythos*, as distinguished from *logos*), a timeless cosmic drama in which all the forces of creation and chaos take part in an epic battle between the congregated might of darkness and the flickering inextinguishable beacon light of Heaven and Earth, a fertility myth of the resurrection of faith and truth, an apocalypse of redemption and intercession, and the final justification of the ways of God to man.

Karbalā' has thus become a compendium containing signs and intimations of Man's predicament, his journey through this vale of suffering and tears, his social and spiritual values, his destiny and

final redemption. And just as the Greek poet hewed out of the granite mass of Greek mythology the shades of his tragedies and epics, so a gifted artist like Anis or Dabeer sees the integrated outline of his *marthīyas* etched out in the different episodes or parts, or combinations and relations of parts of the inexhaustible tale of Karbalā'. And as the tale is inexhaustible, so are the *marthīyas* that emerge out of it innumerable—limited only by the insight and imagination of the poet.

THE WORLD OF THE *MARTHĪYA*

The world of the *marthīya* opens with the constrained journey of the Imam Husayn and his relatives from Madina to Mecca. It extends along the Imam Husayn's journey from Mecca towards Kūfa, which is intercepted at Karbalā'. Karbalā' is the centre of this world, where the battle of truth is fought: the field of Destiny. From Karbalā' it follows the caravan of the surviving widows and orphans and the sole surviving son of the Imam Husayn, the Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn, all chained and manacled, through the merry market crowds and festive courts of Kūfa and Damascus. The last phase is the return of this torn and tattered caravan from Damascus to Karbalā', now turned into a graveyard, and from there back to Medina. At this point the world of *marthīya* closes. It stretches like a track of light, a trail of suffering in the midst of deepening shadows of ghoulish darkness closing in upon it from all sides and trying to obliterate it. And yet this world, so narrow and confined in its temporal dimensions, is so immense in its relationships and significance. It reaches back to the days of the Holy Prophet and beyond it to the Divine Covenant on which the fate and future of Islam depends, and looks forward to the end of time and the Day of Judgement and Redemption. All nature and all history is deeply involved in the final outcome of these events and in what happens in this world. For the poet this world is inexhaustible, peopled with innumerable *marthīyas* waiting for his eye and pen to be quickened into life.

THE CONSTRUCTION

The *marthīya* is a well-organized whole of about 150 to 200 stanzas of six lines each, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The

structure, particularly of *marthīyas* dealing with the death of a hero on the plains of Karbalā', follows a more or less standardized pattern which resembles the ebb and flow of a tide. In *marthīyas* dealing with other subjects the poet modifies this basic structure to suit his vision.

The first part is the opening, or 'face' (*chechra* as it is called). It may start with any subject, however remote, but it must artistically lead to the immediate occasion that gives rise to the action of the *marthīya*. In this part the hero is introduced.

The second part is the rising action which comprises the leave-taking of the hero in the tent or base camp until his appearance before the hostile army.

The third part is the climax. The hero identifies himself to the hostile forces and reprimands them, challenging and threatening them with grievous chastisement at his hands and at the hands of God. Then the hero is shown engaged in single combats, which are depicted correctly in all details of warcraft. Routed in single combats, the enemy launches a mass attack. Here the poet uses all the resources of his art and invention to describe the lightening and wonderful exploits of the horse, and the deadly onslaught of the sword. The horse and the sword, being projections of the hero, acquire a personality of their own.

The fourth part is the falling action, or denouement. The hero, tough, invincible, has to be brought down. This change is a very delicate part of the poem, and must be handled very deftly and very reverentially.

The last part, the catastrophe, and in the spiritual sense the climax, closes on the death of the hero, and the hero departing in a crescendo of grief and sorrow.

Such is the skeleton, and the poet fills it out with flesh and blood and gives it a hundred shapes. He takes pride in playing a thousand changes on a single theme.

The basic unit of the medium is the *mussudas* stanza, four rhyming lines rounded off by a rhyming couplet. The stanza has an individuality of its own, a rising movement in the four rhyming lines clinched by the rhyming couplet. And yet it is just a stop in the progression, a marble slab suiting its place in a very complex edifice. The effect is architectural, very different from the

monotonous flow of the mathnavi. The meter is neither short nor long, capable of being manipulated for every effect of dialogue and action.

The discovery of the medium proved to be as crucial for the development of the *marthīya* as the discovery of blank verse for the flourishing of Elizabethan drama.

The language is assiduously cultured and tastefully polished, fit to be spoken in a king's court. Yet far from displaying any signs of stiffness or artificiality, it has a flow and suppleness, and is alive with colour and movement and dramatic shifts and nuances. This is the natural language of a very formal and sophisticated civilization, and is capable of expressing every mood and portraying every situation.

For the last two hundred years, this language has carried the tradition of *marthīya* with ease and grace without undergoing any apparent change or looking like going out of date.

THE KING'S COURT

The *marthīya*, like drama, is a composite art. It consists not only of composition, it is also performance. The poet's art of poetry, the reciter's art of presentation (the reciter may be the poet himself, or someone else, but reciting the *marthīya* is an art in its own right), attuned to the devotional spirit animating the congregation and the solemnity of the place and the occasion, cumulatively produce the desired effect and fulfill the *marthīya*.

The Imam Bargah is the King's Court, the court of Shāh-i Karbalā'. All the pervading influence and the presiding presence is the Lady of Light, Fāṭima Zahra, the mother of the Imam Husayn. The Prophet and the Family and the angels of God are here—all sharing and watching. The majlis is the Darbar-i 'Āmm, the King's audience of the populace. And for every gesture and every movement, the proper etiquette is described, to which it must conform.

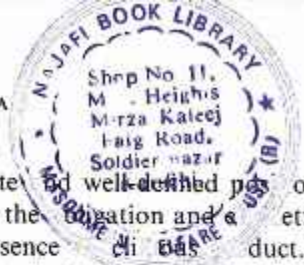
The poet is the court poet, the bard. The reciter is the court herald. His performance is neither sing-song recitation, nor histrionic representation of the stage, nor rhapsodical abandon. Such things would be too vulgar. And yet the reciter has to present the whole variety of situations, from the holiest and the purest to

the most execrable, and lead his audience through the whole gamut of human moods from highest exaltation to deepest pain, and through the whole range of emotions, love and devotion, joy and pride, hatred and anger. He has to give full weight and value to every word of the poet—and he does that just with a restrained movement of his hand, eyebrows, the expression of his face, a change of tone or accent, with an undertone of reverence throughout, controlled by a sense of solemnity. Until he brings the congregation to the appointed tryst, the sacred conclave of grief where full vent is given to the pent-up pathos, and tears are turned into screams. No trace of despair or depression is left. There has been a washing of the heart and the soul. The sinner feels so light. A sort of communion has been established between him and those who sacrificed their all for men, and whom God has invested with authority, and out of this communion springs eternally the hope and certainty of redemption and felicity, a catharsis of a deeply mystical quality.

RELIGION WITH A HUMAN FACE

Marthīya is not religious poetry in the sense that the poet is expressing his religious experiences, though the attitude of the poet towards his subject is one of deep reverence, and the *majlis* is a religious rite. Nor is it religious poetry in the sense of a hymn, or a eulogy, or an elegy. It unfolds a panorama of life. The features of this life are drawn from an idealized image of contemporary Oudh society. This panorama of life is shown at its most climactic moment—the conflict between good and evil, between the insolence and aggressiveness of evil and the suffering and sacrifice of truth. Religion pervades here, as the spirit of human culture, and religious values walk the world in different shapes of human excellence. Just as Thomas Aquinas provides Dante with the key and criterion to judge all humanity, so in the same way does the faith of Anis in Karbalā' give him an insight into the mystery of human life, its beauty and its justification.

The characters on the side of the Imam Ḥusayn are different shapes of human excellence, full of compassion and grace and the milk of human kindness, the very soul of loyalty and fidelity, steadfast and eager to destroy the forces of evil and meet the hero's



death, each one occupying a definite position in that society, and each one knowing the obligations of that position—which is *adab*, the essence of conduct. Yet each character is subtly individualized; the soul of chivalry, the hope and support of all, the protector of women's honour and children's smiles, power pledged to truth, like his father 'Alī; 'Alī Akbar the very image of the Prophet, a beautiful soul residing in a beautiful body, shedding grace and light like the prophet Joseph wherever he moves; Qāsim, mild and retiring and loveable; the two sons of Zaynab restless with the adolescent dreams and ambitions to rise to the stature of their forbathers 'Alī and Ja'far; 'Alī Aṣghar representing humanity in its most tender and innocent condition; Ḥurr, the honest, brave soldier, conscience-stricken, atoning for the past by being the first on the list of martyrs. Surpassing all these is Zaynab, in womanhood; its infinite power of suffering, healing, protecting, preserving and hating all that is mean and impure and tyrannical; and Ḥusayn, the man, in whom all the qualities of power and beauty, of firmness and gentleness mixed in balanced perfection.

The enemies are all painted black with little differentiation, except that Yazīd is a drunken tyrant; Ibn Ziyād, his relentless tool; 'Umar Sa'd has sold his soul for mere pittance; and Shimr is a malignant and degenerate brute. The soldiers are mercenaries, full of sound and fury, putting up a brave show, but cowards at heart.

Against this background of darkness, the characters of light are shown in action. The poetry of the *marthīya* may justly be called the poetry of the beauty and sanctity of human relationships.

DEFINITION ATTEMPTED

The *marthīya* resembles a dramatic tragedy in many respects. It resembles the tragedy in construction. At the heart of it is a dramatic conflict that defies resolution on the social plane. The tragic flaw of the hero is that he is flawless—too good for the world. The action is portrayed in graphic details with changes and surprises. The dialogue has the modulations of dramatic dialogue, typical at once of the situation, of the character, of the interlocutors, and of the poet's art.

But it is very different from a tragedy in the technical sense. It is

not meant for stage representation. The hero is not beset by tragic loneliness—he belongs to a universe more real than any other. Though it raises the issue of human destiny, the idea of fate is excluded by too lively a conscience in the presence of God throughout. The catharsis of a tragedy leaves one, in some sense, a sadder and wiser person, but it is lacking in some positive elements, like the sense of communion and the sense of satisfaction, which are essential ingredients of the overall impression left by the *marthīya*.

Nor is the *marthīya* obviously an epic. It does not narrate—it presents. But the battle which it presents is epic in significance and to some extent in magnitude as well. The hero has epic stature, although the poet emphasizes his very human aspects. And like the epic it unfolds a whole civilization, its mores and manners, its values and morals, its philosophy and world view.

Though not a very wise thing to do, a working definition of the *marthīya* may be attempted somewhat in this way.

Constructed out of a repertoire of Karbalā' stories, the *marthīya* is a complete and integrated presentation, in the suitable poetic form, and through the cultured language, of an action or episode portraying confrontation and the conflict of good and evil, and the tragic death of the hero, in such a way that feelings of exaltation and adoration are aroused for the hero or heroes, and feelings of hatred and execration for the villains, and a bond of communion and partnership are all established through congregational mourning, thus providing a cathartic pleasure proper to the *marthīya*.

THE MARTHĪYA THEN AND NOW

Let us imagine the condition of late 18th and early 19th century Oudh. The Deccan sultanates situated on the border of the great Indo-Muslim civilization had long disappeared. Delhi, the centre of that civilization, is decaying. The civilization is breaking up. All around is anarchy, and an alien power is advancing from all sides. The indigenous civilization does not know this power, does not understand it, nor the meaning and purpose of it. With the decay of civilization, small pockets of culture are forming, closed but complete worlds. Oudh is one of them. These small worlds are doomed to be overrun and overwhelmed by the forces of barbarism in the near future. What can be the choice before this beleaguered

culture? Live fully, brightly, and gracefully while there is still time to do so, and when the hour strikes, give the barbarians a run for their money, and go down fighting like heroes, leaving the rest to God. And to the barbarians.

And this is just what the people of Oudh did in the War of Independence of 1857.

The Karbalā' of the classical *marthīya* is not the fall of a house, but the crash of a civilization, and also a noble, civilized way to face such a crash.

Even today the tradition continues, and the *marthīya* is flourishing. But times have changed. Gone are the days of that cultural twilight when poetry seemed to be the main business of life. Today the business of life is making poetry itself redundant. The *marthīya* does not now belong to the mainstream of life. Even its place in the King's Court has been taken up by pulpit oratory. It now exists as an important branch of poetry. We do not live in a closed and complete world. Winds of change are blowing and our culture has lost its shape. We feel culturally disinherited and are in search of our identity. Life is not so much an experience as a set of problems. Along with the change in times, the vision and approach of the *marthīya* have also changed.

In our *marthīya* we are very much concerned with the causes and consequences of Karbalā'. From myth we have come down to history. What lessons useful to us can be learned from Karbalā'? What lay sermons can be proclaimed on the theme? From presentation we have moved to the propagation of messages. Our *marthīyas* now open with the discussion of some abstract idea that gives the *marthīya* its label or heading. The idea has taken the place of the image. Between us and Karbalā', there stands our interpretation of Karbalā'. The classical poet wrote Karbalā'—we can at best write *about* Karbalā'. The climax of the *marthīya*, the sacrament of weeping and wailing, does not grow out of modern *marthīya*. It hangs loose, like an appendage. We do not need sacrament as much as we need revolution. The temper of our *marthīya* is rational and revolutionary, and perhaps this is as it should be. Every age inherits a great tradition by reliving it, and this it can do only in its own peculiar way, according to its spiritual needs and its ethos.



