

Imam Hussain was the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. His mother was Fatima, the prophet's daughter, and his father was Ali, Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law. Hussain grew up with a tremendous sense of responsibility for the good of mankind. The faith and truth from his grand father, justice and courage from his father, and conviction and steadfastness from his mother were apparent in his personality.

The second caliph Umar appointed Muawiyah as the governor of the province, which today comprises of Syria. Muawiyah, a shrewd politician, was ready to employ any means to get what he wanted, terrorizing the voices of dissent and bribing the greedy. After the assassination of the third caliph, Hussain's father, Ali accepted the position of caliphate upon people's insistence. Ali, a man of principles, immediately dismissed the corrupt governors of the several provinces.

Muawiyah, who by this time had become the monarch of Syria, refused to give up his post. Soon after, Ali was assassinated during morning prayers in the mosque of Kufa. Hassan, Ali's elder son, took the responsibility of caliphate after him. However, Muawiyah took over the caliphate and nominated his son Yazid as his successor. After Muawiyah's death, Yazid assumed power and asked Hussain to pay allegiance to him or be killed. Yazid was an inept ruler and an embodiment of corruption and treachery. He openly defied the

principles of fair treatment and justice and had no respect for Islamic law and Muslim traditions. Hussain, the guardian of his grandfather's message, could not let Yazid ruin the ideals of Islam. Hussain refused to pay allegiance to Yazid saying, "A person like me can never pay allegiance to a person like Yazid." It is important to notice here that Hussain did not say, "I will not pay the oath of allegiance to Yazid." Rather he said "anyone like me can never pay allegiance to anyone like Yazid," Hussain thus proclaimed a universal message, a message to all the people with consciousness for all times and places alike, to remain steadfast in the face of oppression and never submit to falsehood and tyranny.

Hussain, along with his family and few friends, fled his home in Medina and headed towards Mecca. There he got the news that Yazid had sent his men disguised as pilgrims to capture or kill Hussain. Hussain immediately decided to leave Mecca to avoid any bloodshed and keep the sanctity of the holy place (where even the killing of a pest is not permissible). He then headed towards Kufa, where he had received letters of support and appeal from the people of Kufa, who were tired of the oppression of the Syrian rulers. However, Yazid's army blocked Hussain from entering Kufa, and instead, directed him towards the desert plains of Karbala, in Iraq.

Hussain and his followers reached Karbala on the 2nd of Muharram,

the first month of the Islamic calendar. There they camped at the banks of the river Euphrates. For the next few days, Yazid sent troops in thousands to intimidate the small band of Hussain and his followers. On the 7th day of Muharram, the enemy troops took over the river and cut all water supplies to Hussain's camps.

On the 9th of Muharram, Yazid's generals gave Hussain a final ultimatum to pledge to Yazid. Hussain, steadfast on his principles, refused to give in. Instead, he asked the troops to spare them one night that they could spend in remembering God. The next day, on 10th of Muharram, before the battle began, Hussain rode towards the enemy camps several times and gave sermons appealing to their conscience of Yazid's soldiers regarding who he was, his close relation to the Prophet Mohammad whom they claimed to follow, and his mission to defend the true Islam. Yazid's commanders still insisted that he pledge allegiance to Yazid and accept him as the caliph. Hussain refused to surrender.

The battle began; Hussain and about 70 of his relatives and friends fought courageously against Yazid's forces. Hussain and his companions embraced martyrdom for the principles of truth and justice. The women and children of Hussain's family were taken from place to place throughout Yazid's kingdom as prisoners. They were humiliated in public. Nonetheless, Hussain's sister Zainab and the other

ladies of the house, following Hussain's path, delivered eloquent sermons, touching the audiences as they told them about the injustices of Yazid and the true story behind Hussain's martyrdom. These sermons are available in the books of history.

When the women and children were finally released from Yazid's prison, they continued to spread the message of Hussain. The apparent victors were disgraced and their example so remains in the pages of history while Hussain's message still prevails. Karbala today is a bustling town in southern Iraq, where thousands of pilgrims convene each year to visit Hussain's glorious tomb to remember him for his great sacrifice. His martyrdom is observed with solemn reverence all over the world every year during the first ten days of Muharram.

For more information on the topic, please consult the following:

Dr. Ibrahim Ayati. "A Probe into the History of Ashura." Islamic Seminary Publications: Karachi, Pakistan. Available Online <http://al-islam.org/ashura>

Yusuf Ali, Abdullah. "Imam Hussain and his Martyrdom." Available Online. <http://al-islam.org/short/martyrdom/index.htm>



This brochure has been prepared by *the Society for Islamic Awareness* to promote a better understanding of Islam. For questions regarding the content of the brochure, please email us at sia@www.utexas.edu

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IMAM HUSSAIN IN ISLAM:

A SHORT NARRATION OF THE HISTORY BEHIND THE SACRIFICE OF HUSSAIN AND HIS FOLLOWERS

"Emulate & compete each other in achieving the human value and rush and hasten to get the spiritual treasures."

"Best of wealth is that with which one protects his fame and dignity."

-- Imam Hussain