

THE MARTYRDOM
OF SAYYIDUNĀ
ḤUSAYN



by

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH ﷺ said, “Ḥusayn is from me and I am from Ḥusayn. May Allah love the one who loves Ḥusayn. Ḥusayn is a special grandchild among the grandchildren.”¹ Once when ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ was resting in the shade of the Ka‘ba he beheld Ḥusayn and proclaimed, “Today this man is the most beloved person in the sight of the inhabitants of the heaven and earth!”²

‘Ubayd b. Ḥunayn reported: “Al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī related to me, ‘I went to ‘Umar [b. al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه] as he was standing on the pulpit and delivering a sermon. I climbed atop it and said, “Descend from my father’s pulpit and go to that of your father!” ‘Umar replied, “My father did not have a pulpit.” ‘Umar then took hold of me and sat me at his side and I was playing with some pebbles in my hand. After he descended from the pulpit, he took me to his home and asked, “Who taught you that?” I replied, “By Allah, no one taught me that.” ‘Umar said, “May my father be sacrificed! You should come see us more often.” Sometime later I went to see him and he was at his door having a private conversation with Ibn ‘Umar and Mu‘āwiya. As Ibn ‘Umar left I went along with him and met with ‘Umar later. Upon finally meeting ‘Umar he said to me, “I haven’t seen you.” I replied, “By Allah, O Leader of the Believers, I came to see you but you were having a private conversation with

¹ Imam al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā’ wa al-lughāt*, 1:163.

² Imam al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 3:285.

Mu‘āwiya, so I went back with Ibn ‘Umar.” ‘Umar replied, “You have more right than Ibn ‘Umar! The gray hairs you see on our heads are from Allah and then you!””³

Imam al-Nawawī stated:

Muṣ‘ab b. ‘Umayr reported, “Ḥusayn performed Hajj on foot twenty-five times.” Those of his time used to say, “Ḥusayn ﷺ was virtuous, frequent in his prayers, fasting, Hajj, charity, and given to myriad good works.” He was killed on a Friday (although some say it was actually a Saturday) on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ in the year 61 AH at Karbala, Iraq, and his grave is well known and visited, and blessings are sought from it.⁴

Ḥusayn would say, “Be assiduous in love for us, the Prophetic Household (Ahl al-Bayt), for whoever meets Allah having loved us will enjoy our intercession (*Shafā‘a*).” Imam al-Shāfi‘ī said, “A son of Ḥusayn died but there were no signs of grief on Ḥusayn’s face. He was taken to task for this, but he replied, ‘We are of the Prophetic Household: we ask Allah and He gives us, and when He wills something that we dislike, but which He loves, we display contentment.’”⁵

³ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamayīz al-Ṣaḥāba*, 1:332.

⁴ Imam al-Nawawī, *Tabdhīb al-asmā’ wa al-lughāt*, 1:163.

⁵ *al-Kawākib al-duriyya*, 1:149.

Ḥusayn's Martyrdom

Regarding the events surrounding Ḥusayn's glorious martyrdom, it is reported from ʿĀ'isha ؓ—or Umm Salama ؓ—that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to her, “An angel came to see me in my home, although he had never approached me before that. He informed me: ‘Ḥusayn is to be killed, and if you like I can show you the area wherein he is to be slain. . .’”

Saʿīd b. Jumhān reported: “Jibrīl came to the Prophet ﷺ with some dust from the area wherein Ḥusayn was to be slain—it is said that the name of the region is Karbala—so the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Distress and tribulation.’”⁶



It is reported that ʿAlī ؓ said, “Ḥusayn will undoubtedly be killed, and I know for certain the stretch of land upon which he will be slain.”

ʿAmmār al-Duhanī related that Kaʿb [b. Mālīk] passed by ʿAlī and said, “A son belonging to this man shall certainly be killed among a group, the sweat of their horses will not dry until they return to Muḥammad ﷺ.” When Ḥasan passed by, Kaʿb was asked, “Is it this one?” He said, “No,” and when Ḥusayn passed by he was asked, “Is it this one?” and he said, “Yes.”

ʿAbdullah b. Najā reported that his father travelled with ʿAlī as the latter's water carrier. As they were on their way to Siffin and approaching Nineveh, ʿAlī called out to him: “O Abū ʿAbdillāh! Be patient at the banks of the Euphrates.” Abū ʿAbdillāh inquired, “What is wrong?” ʿAlī replied, “I went to see the Prophet ﷺ one day and his eyes were welling up with tears. He said, ‘Jibrīl just left me and informed me that Ḥusayn will be killed.’ He asked me, ‘Do you allow me to present the ground on which he is to be slain, for


⁶ The subtlety of this phrase is lost in translation. When saying “Distress and tribulation,” the Prophet ﷺ used the Arabic words *karb* and *balāʾ*, which, when taken together, sound out the name of the land of Karbala. —Tr

you to smell its scent?’ I replied, ‘Yes,’ and he outstretched his hand and took a handful of the earth and gave it to me, and thus I am unable to control my eyes [from welling up with tears].”⁷

Ibn ‘Abbās  reported: “Allah revealed to Muḥammad , ‘I killed seventy thousand people in retribution for the killing of Yaḥyā son of Zakariyyā, and I shall certainly kill twice that number in retribution for the killing of your grandson.’”⁸

Imam al-Dhahabī said:

It has reached us that Ḥusayn was unhappy with Ḥasan’s decision to hand the reins of the caliphate over to Mu‘āwiya. Ḥusayn believed that fighting should have taken place, but he suppressed his anger and obeyed his brother and pledged fealty. After Ḥasan’s death, when Mu‘āwiya invested his son Yazīd with the caliphate, Ḥusayn felt pained. It [the caliphate] was rightfully Ḥusayn’s, so he along with Ibn Abī Bakr and Ibn al-Zubayr refused to pledge fealty until they were overcome by Mu‘āwiya and he took the pledge of fealty from them through coercion. At that time they were defeated and unable to assume the reins of power.

After Mu‘āwiya passed away the caliphate was handed over to his son Yazīd, and most of the people pledged fealty to him, but Ḥusayn refused and went to Mecca. While in Mecca he received letters from the people of Iraq informing him that they pledged their fealty to him after Mu‘āwiya’s death. After receiving this news, Ḥusayn sent his cousin Muslim b. ‘Aqīl to Iraq to formally take their pledge of loyalty and prepare the way for Ḥusayn’s journey there. And so Ḥusayn set off from Mecca to Iraq. At the time, Ibn ‘Umar was unaware that Ḥusayn was travelling, so when he learned of his impending journey, he caught up with him two miles outside of Mecca and bid his return—but Ḥusayn refused. Ibn ‘Umar said: “Let me relate to you a narration. Jibrīl  went

⁷ Imam al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 3:288–290.

⁸ *al-Kawākib al-duriyya*, 1:148.

to the Prophet ﷺ and presented him with two choices: either this world or the Hereafter. The Prophet ﷺ chose the Hereafter—and you are certainly a part of him! I swear by Allah, none of you will ever attain power there!” Ḥusayn said, “I have with me two loads of letters from the people of Iraq wherein they pledge their loyalty.” Ibn ‘Umar replied, “What shall you do with a folk who killed your father, betrayed your brother, and refused all but to continue?” Ibn ‘Umar then embraced Ḥusayn and wept as he said, “I bid you farewell in Allah’s care.” There was no one present who was not grieved to see Ḥusayn journey ahead, and when news of his journey reached his brother Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiya (in Medina) the latter wept so much that his tears filled a bowl.

When Yazīd learned of Ḥusayn’s journey he sent a letter to his governor in Kufa, ‘Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād, ordering him to pursue Muslim b. ‘Aqīl and slay him. ‘Ubaydullāh was successful and killed Muslim b. ‘Aqīl, but news of this did not reach Ḥusayn until there was but three miles between him and Qādisiya. Al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd met Ḥusayn on the way and called out, “Go back from whence you came, for I have not left any good for you behind me!” Al-Ḥurr also informed him of what happened to Muslim b. ‘Aqīl.

Soon after, Ḥusayn met with al-Farazdaq and asked him about the situation, to which al-Farazdaq replied, “The hearts of the people are with you, but their swords are with Banū Umayya, and the divine judgment has descended from the heavens.” At that moment, Ḥusayn contemplated returning, but in his group were the brethren of Muslim b. ‘Aqīl. They said, “We shall not return until we avenge his murder or are killed.” They continued on.

Ibn Ziyād had readied an army four thousand strong—and some say it was twenty thousand strong—to meet Ḥusayn and his forces. On that fateful day in Karbala the confrontation took place; Ḥusayn approached with forty-five armed horsemen and nearly one hundred foot soldiers. He was met by the army and their emir,

‘Umar b. Sa‘d, and prepared for battle. The majority of those who fought against Ḥusayn were from those who wrote letters of support and pledged loyalty to him.⁹

On the night of ‘Āshūrā’, Ḥusayn gathered his supporters together, and after praising Allah, he said: “I am certain that they shall fight against you tomorrow, so I permit all of you to leave me. The darkness of this night has covered you, so those of you who have the strength should take one of my family members and let him depart in your midst, for it is I that they seek. If they see me they will not bother to pursue you.” Ḥusayn’s family members replied, “May Allah not allow us to remain alive after you! By Allah, we shall never part ways with you!” Ḥusayn’s supporters uttered the same sentiment.

When the morning arrived Ḥusayn supplicated: “O Allah! You are my Reliance in every distress, my hope in every difficulty, and You are my Support in every tribulation that descends upon me. You are the Owner of every grace and the Possessor of every good.”

Ḥusayn said to ‘Umar b. Sa‘d and his forces, “Do not be hasty! By Allah, I did not come to you until I received letters from your compatriots lamenting the death of the Sunna, the rise of hypocrisy, and the abandonment of the prescribed punishments. Come forward, for perhaps Allah will bring reconciliation in the *Umma* by means of you. I have come to you, but if you are averse to this I will return, so you too should return to your people. Is it fitting for you to kill me? Is my blood lawful? Am I not the son of your Prophet’s daughter and the son of his cousin? Are not Ḥamza, ‘Abbās, and Ja‘far my uncles? Has it not reached you what Allah’s Messenger ﷺ said about me and my brother, ‘These two are the leaders of the youth of Paradise?’”

⁹ Ibid., I:143–144.

‘Umar b. Sa‘d said, “If your affair was in my hand I would have responded to your call.” Ḥusayn replied, “‘Umar, there shall certainly come from this a day that bodes ill for you. O Allah! The people of Iraq have deceived and betrayed me and did what they did to my brother! O Allah! Scatter their efforts against them and wipe them out!”¹⁰

In *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣ* it is recorded: “Al-Ḥusayn lowered his head and dozed off. When he woke up he said, ‘I just saw my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and he said to me, “Be patient, son, for today you shall come to me.”’”¹¹

Once he was certain that [Yazīd’s forces] were determined to fight him, Ḥusayn stood among his followers to speak. After praising Allah and lauding Him, he said: “The world has changed and become unrecognizable and its good has left. Let the believer long for meeting Allah, for I do not see death as anything but felicity, and life with oppressors as a crime—fight against them.”¹²

Al-Dhahabī said, “He donned his armor and his followers fought in his midst until they were all slain. His son, ‘Alī, recited a couplet in the *rajz* meter:

*I am ‘Alī, son of Ḥusayn, son of ‘Alī
We and Allah’s House are worthier of the Prophet*

As the attack ensued, Ḥusayn was becoming increasingly thirsty. A man came to him with water in tow, but as Ḥusayn was about to drink, Ḥuṣayn b. Tamīm fired an arrow at him, piercing his mouth. Wounded, Ḥusayn began collecting his blood with his hands and praising Allah, and set out in the direction of the Euphrates; however, the army prevented him from reaching water. For a

¹⁰ Imam al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 3:301.


¹¹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣ*, p. 227.

¹² *al-Kawākib al-duriyya*, p. 1:144.

second time, he was shot by an arrow, this time by another archer, and the arrow pierced his neck. It is reported that for the remainder of that day (until all alone), no fighter approached Ḥusayn save that he was surrounded by fighters loyal to him, while he fought on as courageous as a brave knight while maintaining his self-composure and causing the forces of Yazīd to flee as a goat flees from a lion. After they fled from him, Shimr called out: “May your mothers be bereaved! What are you waiting for?”¹³

Said Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī:

[After the attack] they examined his wounds and found thirty-three stab wounds from spears, thirty-four cuts from swords, and one hundred and twenty puncture holes in his garment from arrows. Their forces stripped him of his clothes after he was killed—even taking his pants—leaving him naked, and they also stripped his womenfolk and daughters of their clothing.¹⁴

When Yazīd’s forces finally killed Ḥusayn, they beheaded him and brought his head to Ibn Ziyād. Ibn Ziyād in turn ordered the forces to take Ḥusayn’s head, and those who survived from his family, to Yazīd. Among those who were taken was ‘Alī, the son of Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn—who was ill at the time—and Ḥusayn’s paternal aunt Zaynab . When they were finally brought before Yazīd he expressed joyous exuberance. Treating them like young children, he bid them to wait at the door of the mosque and proceeded to humiliate them and exceed all bounds. When his forces finally brought him Ḥusayn’s head, Yazīd excitedly struck his sides with a stick, saying, “By Allah, Ḥusayn! I have met your rebellion head on!” At first, Yazīd expressed great joy at what he had done, but later he felt regret because the Muslims expressed their repugnance

¹³ Imam al-Dhahabī, *Siyār a’lām al-nubalā’*.

¹⁴ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣ*, p. 228.

for him and the world began hating him.¹⁵

The martyrdom of Ḥusayn illustrates more than anything else the paltriness of the material world in the sight of Allah, and shows truly how it does not equal even a gnat's wing in His estimation. The world is ephemeral and swiftly fading; there is no delight in it that remains, and no punishment in it that lasts, and so for this reason, Allah is not pleased with the world for His saints and beloveds [as a reward]. Therefore in compensation, Allah has granted them an everlasting and endless bliss: "*Indeed, the abode of the Hereafter, that is the real [eternal] life, if they but knew.*" (Quran 29:64)

It is reported that Ibn ʿAbbās ؓ said, "In the middle of the day I beheld the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in a dream. He appeared dusty with his hair disheveled, holding in his hand a bottle filled with blood. I asked, 'O Messenger of Allah! What is this?' He replied, 'This is the blood of Ḥusayn and his compatriots; I have been collecting it all day.' The day in which I beheld this dream was the day in which Ḥusayn was killed."¹⁶

Razīn said, "Salmā narrated to me: 'I went to see Umm Salama and found her crying. I asked, 'Why are you crying.' "Because," she said, "I beheld the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in a dream and there was dust on his head and beard. I asked him, 'What's wrong, O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'I just witnessed the killing of Ḥusayn.'""

Shahr b. Ḥawshab said, "I was with Umm Salama, the wife of Allah's Messenger ﷺ, when the news of Ḥusayn's murder reached her. She asked, 'Did they really kill him?' May Allah fill their homes and graves with fire!' then she fainted."

Ibn Sīrīn said, "After the killing of Prophet Yaḥyā ؑ, the heavens did not cry over anyone's murder, except for that of Ḥusayn." Al-Aswad b. Qays said, "After Ḥusayn's murder, the

¹⁵ *al-Kawākib al-duriyya*, 1:146.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 1:147.

horizon turned red like blood and remained like that for six months.” Al-Naḍra al-Azdiya said, “After Ḥusayn was murdered, the heavens rained and everything was covered in blood.” Janāb al-Kalbī related, “I traveled to Karbala and said to a man among the Arab aristocrats, ‘It has reached me that you all heard the wailing of the Jinn [after Ḥusayn ﷺ was killed]. The man replied, ‘You will not meet a freeman or slave except that he will tell you that he heard it. ‘So didn’t you hear it?’ I asked. He replied, ‘I heard them all saying:

*The Messenger wiped his brow
And so his cheeks shine with luster
His parents hailed from Quraysh, noble
And his Grandfather is the best of grandfathers’*¹⁷

In his book *The Messenger’s ﷺ Sons in Karbala*, my dear father—may Allah be merciful to him—painted a literary picture of those final glorious moments:

O Abū ‘Abdillāh! You have Allah! Have the divine decrees chosen you for this toil that crushes mountains, except for the fact that you are suitable and fitting for it? Patience, O Family of Muḥammad! This is your role in life and your portion of the world. O leaders of the Hereafter! O Kings of Paradise!

The pious were slain one-by-one around the defense perimeter, fighting with valor; Ḥusayn was here and there, shoring up the defenses in one area, fighting in another, while his pure blood was gushing from his mouth where he had been struck by an arrow as he attempted to take water!

He stood alone before his enemies. He was all by himself: after his compatriots were struck down his family took shelter. All of

¹⁷ Imam al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 3:312–318.

them embraced the testimony of faith, uttering it in the path of the Truth.

He was surrounded by his soon-to-be killers. They remained in their places, their eyes swerving, their hearts trembling. Despite the fact that they all took part and shared in his killing and the shedding of his blood, the fighters were terrified of the prospect of being responsible for dealing the final death blow. It was at this point the wretched Shimr b. Dhī Jawshan entered the ranks and shouted at the forces, ordering them to sever the head of the heroic Ḥusayn. The fighters came close to him, but despite his loneliness and many wounds, Ḥusayn set upon them with his sword. Suddenly, out of a tent came a young man. It was ʿAbdullāh the son of Ḥasan. He cast a furtive glance at his uncle Ḥusayn and swung his sword in his direction, loudly proclaiming with the innocence of children: “Would you kill my uncle, you son of a harlot!” That son of a harlot swung his cowardly sword at the young boy, but fell to the ground without hitting him. At that moment, Ḥusayn swiftly moved to carry his nephew back to his aunt, Sayyida Zaynab, who had witnessed all the bloodshed and seen the unfolding events—of course, fully resigning her affair to Allah and showing pleasure with His divine preordainment!

Some time later, it is reported, Sayyida Zaynab came out, wounded and limping, and saw her brother standing alone surrounded by the beasts. The heroic Ḥusayn shouted at his sister, bidding her return to her quarters. Then, he turned to his soon-to-be killers and proclaimed loudly, “Do you gather to kill me? I hope that Allah will honor me by humiliating you and taking vengeance for me from whence you perceive not!”

With his sinful sword in hand, one of Yazīd’s forces came before Ḥusayn and struck him on his left wrist, severing his blessed hand. And again, with his oppressive sword, the fighter struck Ḥusayn on his back, causing him to fall to the ground. They thought that the

ordeal was over and that they could now leave, but to their shock and surprise, Ḥusayn stood again, leaning upon his sword. At that moment the other forces rushed to him and dealt their final blows.

Whence comes the filth of humanity, Shimr b. Dhī Jawshan, to cut the head off the heroic Ḥusayn. He kept the head and traveled with it to show Ibn Ziyād and Yazīd—just as the head of Prophet Yaḥyā son of Zakariyyā was cut off and sent as a gift to one of the tyrants of Banū Isrāʿīl!

The day had breathed its last breaths. The sun had set, leaving in its wake an awe inspiring burning reddish glow that covered the whole horizon. It was as if it was a carpet that paved the way for Ḥusayn to ascend to Allah’s gardens and the souls of the martyrs! Unlike the weather in that locality and in that time of the year, a strong rain poured down, dropping powerful rain drops with the sound of thunder. The criminals thought it was a harbinger of evil, a warning of their fate. It was not. They were much too paltry in the sight of Allah for that. It was the heavens sending down its water as a way of sending her salutations. It was a salutation of reverence for the sacrifices of the martyrs! It was a salutation to receive the souls of those martyrs who had just begun their sojourn to eternity to receive their reward, bliss, and grace with the All-Merciful!



