

The Most Vivid Portraits of Gallantry and Sacrifice

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?">

Source:Immigration and Jihad

On the tenth of Muharram (Ashura), the Imam said the last Dhuhr (noon) prayer before he was martyred. Most of his comrades in arms were martyred earlier that day, in the exchanges of volleys of arrows between the combatants. Thus, he was left with the immediate members of his family and a small band of his companions. The fighting force of the Imam totaled some seventy-two warriors. And yet, despite their small number, they were enjoying high morale and showing exemplary gallantry.

Being the commander of this small army, Imam Husain did not show any sign of weakness or despondency. He planned for the showdown with the enemy by positioning three main groups of his soldiers into a central segment (the heart), right and left flanks, as any other regular army did in those circumstances. Zuhair bin al-Qayn was appointed commander of the right flank, Habib bin Mudhahir was charged with the responsibility of defending the left flank. His brother al-Abbas (a.s.) was made the standard-bearer.

The companions of Imam Hussain (a.s.) were eager to start the fight. However, the Imam was insistent on not launching the first strike, leaving it to the enemy to do so. That starting shot came at the hands of Omar bin Sa'ad.

Ibn Sa'ad was keen on holding both the spiritual and the materialistic at the same time. He was aspiring to securing Ibn Ziyad's offer of appointing him the governor of Ray, but without staining his hands with the blood of al-Hussain. Because of this soul-searching and struggle to subdue his inclinations, he embarked on a string of letters to Imam Hussain with a view to avoiding the bloodshed. When the news reached Ibn Ziyad, he wrote to him a stern letter, ordering him to quickly kill the Imam. He threatened him that he would sack him and appoint someone else in his place, should he choose to ignore his instructions.

Ibn Sa'ad could not rid himself of his bondage to the materialistic world. So, since he was given a choice between this world and the next, he opted for the former, selling his faith in return. Thus, he acquiesced to the order of Ibn Ziyad. In so doing, he demonstrated dishonourable qualities and treachery and committed one of the most heinous crimes in the history of mankind. Ibn Ziyad's justifications for committing some of those atrocities was that he was seeking to be seen taking a position of neutrality, i.e. by not siding with Imam Hussain (a.s.). In order to show his loyalty to Ibn Ziyad, especially in the light of the latter's receiving many

reports accusing him of showing reluctance in fighting the Imam, he embarked on a killing spree, massacring the Progeny of the Prophet (a.s.). When the two adversarial armies pitched their fighters opposite one another, Ibn Ziyad took a bow and arrow from one of his bowmen, or archers, placed an arrow in the bow and shot in the direction of al-Hussain's camp, remarking, "Bear witness for me with the Prince [Ibn Ziyad] that I was the first one to shoot]".

Another of the Imam's companions was Aabis bin Shibeeb ash-Shakiri, who was filled with high spirit and valour. He took the centre stage of the battlefield and issued a challenge to the army of Ibn Ziyad, if there was any one among them who was prepared to fight him in one-to-one combat. No one dared to respond to his challenge. Having repeated his call several times, but to know avail, and realizing that the coat of arms and headgear he was wearing were proving cumbersome, he parted with them. Thus, he mounted attacks on the enemy soldiers who were fleeing before him. They were not able to kill him, only by stoning him and shooting him with torrents of arrows. Thus, he was martyred.

On the day of the Battle of Kerbala, all the companions of Imam Hussain (a.s.), men and women, depicted the most vivid portraits of gallantry and sacrifice. They left their indelible marks in the chapters of history of mankind, only to be revered and emulated. Had their equivalent been found in the history of the West, they would have held them in a very high regard.

Abdullah bin Omeir al-Kalbi was another of the companions of Imam Hussain. In his company were his wife and mother. He was a gallant warrior. When he wanted to join the battle, his wife, a newly wed woman, tried to prevent him and pleaded with him, "With whom you are going to leave me? Who is going to take care of me? Please do not leave me behind for bereavement." On hearing her, his mother intervened, "O my son! Do not listen to her. Go and fight in defence of the son of the Messenger of God, so that he would tomorrow, on the Day of Judgement, be your intercessor. I will not be pleased with you until you got killed fighting with al-Hussain." He assaulted the enemy and got killed in the process.

His mother plucked the courage, arming herself with a pole, and embarked on attacking the enemy. Al-Hussain prevented her from doing so, saying, "May all members of your family be rewarded with that which is best. Go back and join the rest of the women. May God have mercy on you. Being a woman, you are not required to do jihad."

As the battle progressed, more massacres took place. The enemy beheaded Abdullah bin al-Hussain, [who was just an infant], hurling the severed head towards his mother. She held it and wiped the dirt off it, hugging and kissing it, and saying, "O my son! I am pleased with you, I am pleased." She then tossed the baby's head towards the camp of the enemy, saying, "What we

give away in the Way of God, we do not reclaim.”

Among the other supporters of al-Hussain was a boy, aged either ten or twelve years, whose father was killed earlier on in the fighting. Armed with his sword, he approached the Imam and asked for permission to enter the fight. The Imam did not grant him permission out of sympathy for his mother who had just been bereaved of her husband, saying, “The father of this boy was killed in the first campaign, and maybe his mother does not like him to be killed.” The boy replied that his mother had agreed to his taking part in the fighting and that she would be pleased with him, if he got killed in defence of al-Hussain.

That boy was of an outstanding character, demonstrating his moral fibre in the battle. His way of joining the battle was different from the manner the rest of the fighters, who were coming forward for their debut in the battle. They introduce themselves and their lineage by way of reciting war poetry in a roaring style (rajz).

That boy did not follow in the footsteps of the fighters who preceded him and introduced themselves in that pattern. Instead, he recited a couplet, singing the praise of his connection with al-Hussain (a.s.) and being one of his soldiers per se, “My lord is Hussain, the pleasure that descended on the heart of the bearer of good tidings, the warner [Prophet Mohammad]. Ali and Fatima are his parents. Do you know of anyone thus pure-bred?”

The eleventh of Muharram, 61 AH. [Circa 680 CE.] was one of the worst days that the Progeny of the Prophet (a.s.) had witnessed. Examining the tragedy of Kerbala from its both ends, i.e. the shining side that is full of vivid images of bravery, patience and sacrifice in the cause of God and the dark side that teems with the ugliest imagery of treachery, vileness, and crime, the implications of the dialogue between God and the angels when He was informing them of Adam’s creation, would become manifestly clear,

“Behold, thy Lord said to the angels; I will create a vicegerent on earth. They said: Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)? He said: I know what ye know not.” (2/30).

All that which the angels saw of the nature of man and his ability to do mischief, his capacity for going astray and arrogance, was demonstrated at the battle of Kerbala. And yet, alongside that evil, the epitomes of virtue and sublimity were also established. The angels did not see these luminous aspects of man, when God Almighty addressed them, thus, “I know what ye know not.”

Indeed, Kerbala was a strange battleground for trials. The criminals committed the most heinous crimes. Among those was the act of violence perpetrated against children and young people, beheading them and tearing their corpses to pieces before the eyes of their mothers.

Those who were massacred in this way on that day in Kerbala were eight, three youth and five children.

Awn bin Abdulla bin Ja'far was another martyr who was killed in the same way. His mother, Zeinab, [daughter of Imam Ali (a.s.)], witnessed his killing. Zeinab had demonstrated a noble character and sublime upbringing, in that historians are almost unanimous in confirming that she did not mention any thing about her son, be it before or after his martyrdom, as she must have been aware of what was going to happen to her brother, Imam Hussain (a.s.). So, she treated the sacrifice of her son as a small contribution towards defending her brother and the principles he stood for. This self-denial was evident when she came out of her tent in the wake of the martyrdom of her nephew, Ali al-Akbar, lamenting his death.

Another of the martyrs of Kerbala was a boy, aged ten. Historiographers have it that the boy came out of his tent disorientated after the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. He was distraught because the events, which were unfolding before his eyes, overwhelmed him. He was spotted by one of the enemy camp who descended upon him, beheaded him and snatched two earrings he was wearing. This happened in the presence of his mother, who went out to look for him.

Another young boy met his death that day in a shocking manner. It was Abdullah bin Imam al-Hassan (a.s.), who was around ten years old. It is said that when his father died he was either still in his mother's womb or a suckling sibling. He was brought up by his uncle, Imam Hussain (a.s.). That is why there was a strong bond between uncle and nephew.

Although Imam Hussain ordered members of his family not to venture out of their tents, yet he could not bear staying put after his uncle fell to the ground having been fatally wounded in the battle. He broke free from her aunt's hands, Zeinab, who was trying to restrain him, and ran towards his uncle, shouting, "By God! I am not going to part with my uncle."

Having reached the place where his uncle fell, he threw himself on his uncle's chest. Imam Hussain (a.s.) showed utmost forbearance and hugged the boy. In the meantime, a soldier of the enemy's camp was about to drive his sword into the body of Imam Hussain when the boy yelled at him, saying, "O son of the evil one! Are you killing my uncle?"

He then raised his arm to prevent the sword blow from reaching the body of his uncle. The full force of the blow fell on his arm, severing it. The boy shouted, "O Uncle! Help!" [While still lying, suffering from his wounds], the Imam embraced his nephew tighter, saying to him, "O my nephew! Show patience for what has befallen you. God will soon unite you with your pure fathers and forefathers – The Messenger of God, Ali, Hamza, Ja'far and al-Hassan