



Give mankind a chance to gain consciousness
every tribe will call out, "Hussain is ours!"

~ **Josh Malihabadi**, *urdu poet* ~



It is wrong to say Husayn is beloved to the Muslims
Husayn is the support for every oppressed soul.

~ **Banarsi Lal Varma**, *Hindu poet* ~



Everybody knows dying after life,
But you (Husayn) taught us how to live after death.

~ **Mehendra Singh Bedi**, *Hindu Poet* ~



O Josh, call out to the Prince of Karbala [Husayn],
cast a glance at this twentieth century,
look at this tumult, chaos, and the earthquake.
At this moment there are numerous Yazids,
and yesterday there was only one.
From village to village might has assumed the role of truth,
once again, Human feet are in chains.

~ **Josh Malihabadi**, *urdu poet* ~



THE PARAGONS OF JUSTICE

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par·a·gon (pär'ə-gŏn')

noun

Definition:

1. A model of excellence or perfection of a kind; a peerless example: *a paragon of justice.*
2. a. An unflawed diamond weighing at least 100 carats.
b. A very large spherical pearl.

Synonyms:

apotheosis, archetype, beau ideal, beaut, beauty, best, champ, champion, cream, criterion, cynosure, epitome, exemplar, gem, ideal, jewel, last word, love, lovely, masterpiece, model, nonpareil, original, paradigm, pattern, perfection, pick, prototype, quintessence, standard, sublimation, tops, trump, ultimate.

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IN THE WORDS OF HUSAYN



"I am not rising (against Yazid) as an insolent or an arrogant person, or a mischief-monger or tyrant. I have risen (against Yazid) as I seek to reform the Ummah (community) of my grandfather. I wish to bid the good and forbid the evil."

"Oh people, verily the Messenger of Allah has said: If anyone witnesses an oppressive ruler...yet does not oppose (the oppressive ruler) through his behaviors and sayings, it is just on Allah to place him the place of that oppressor."

"Oh My Lord! You are my haven in every mishap, my hope in every predicament my refuge and defender in every ordeal...I (have) entrusted You and resorted to You out of preference over others, You did not let me down...You are the Giver of every boon and the ultimate source of every wish to be granted."

*"I have abandoned the creation in Your love
I have orphaned my children so that I may see You
If the swords were to cut me into pieces in Your love
Even then my heart would not long for other than You"*

"O Allah what did he find who lost you, and what did he loose who found you?"

"Oh people! Track back my lineage. Relate me and consider who I am. Then look back and remonstrate with yourselves. Consider whether it is right for you to kill me and encroach upon my integrity. Am I not the son of your Prophet's daughter and the son of his vicegerent and cousin, the first of the believers in Allah and his Messenger? Was not Hamza, the master of martyrs, the uncle of my father? Was not the 'winged' Ja'far my uncle? Have you not heard of the tradition of the Prophet concerning myself and my brother, "These are the two lords of the youth of the inhabitants of paradise".

Husayn gave his life so that he could live forever in the hearts and minds of those who, like him, uphold the flag of justice and truth and refuse to submit to tyranny. He is a man who sacrificed all he had - a man who deserves to be loved by every peace loving man and woman. Muslims of all backgrounds yearn to be like him and to follow in his footsteps. Husayn is loved not for his relation to Prophet Muhammad, but for his sacrifice in the way of God. In addition to an admiration for the character of Husayn, it is the command of the Prophet Muhammad that causes the Muslims to love Husayn. The following is a collection of sayings by the about Husayn in the Islamic tradition.

"He who loves Hasan and Husayn, loved me, and he who makes them angry has made me angry."

"Hasan and Husayn are the chiefs of the youth of Paradise..."

"They (Hassan and Husayn) are my two sweet-smelling flowers in this world."

"Whosoever wishes to see such a person who lives on earth but whose dignity is honored by the Heaven-Dwellers, should see my grandson Husayn."

"Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn."

It is understandable that the Prophet should say that Husayn is from him; after all, he is the grandson of the Prophet. However, what is more interesting to note is that the Prophet says that he is from Husayn. If this is taken with a literal understanding it does not make sense. How is a grandfather from a grandson? It is because Husayn and Prophet Muhammad are two rays of light from the same source. Husayn embodied full devotion to God and his every step was in the footprints of God's prophets.



Only now and again rises above the common level a rare spirit like that of Husayn son of Ali. The light emitting out of such a paragon of humanity shines like a strong beacon upon a dark and disordered world. It seems that the artistic hands of the Creator has composed the scene of Karbala with utmost precision, so as to provide humanity with the archetypes of good and evil; martyr and tyrant; oppressed and the oppressor. The tragedy of Karbala in 680 CE provides humanity a better understanding, in absolute terms, of the concepts of human values, human dignity and human freedom.

It was indeed the case when Husayn's great grandson, Ja'far al-Sadiq (702—765 CE), expressed, "Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala." This statement emphasizes the universality of Husayn's message - where Karbala and Ashura symbolize space and time, respectively, in which any conflict against injustice and for the cause of truth occurs.

Thus, dear friends! In presenting *The Paragons of Justice* we invite you to consider Husayn not simply as a figure enshrined in the annals of history, but to move with him in reality. Human beings have the distinguishing property of the 'free will' and with it, the responsibility to choose the path of truth. When you witness an injustice occurring or when your conscience presents you with a moral dilemma, not choosing, or so-called "neutrality" only amounts to strengthening the forces of aggression and falsehood.

This is an invitation to awaken your conscience.

Some describe the event that took place in Karbala, as a 'massacre' due to Husayn's outnumbered army of 72 men against Yazid's army of 30,000. However, to do justice to the valour and faith shown by Husayn and his followers at Karbala, this event is better described as "The Struggle of the Oppressed against the Oppressor". Highlighted below is a selection of key individuals who played important roles in the historical events that led to the battle of Karbala.

Husayn son of Ali – "The King of Martyrs" – was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his son in law and cousin Ali Ibn Abu Talib. The Prophet expressed his love for Husayn many times. Husayn was martyred on the 10th of Muharram 61AH/680CE, a day known as Ashura. For his refusal to pledge his allegiance to the caliph Yazid he was forced to leave his home with his family and friends and was lead to a desert called Kerbala where he, along with his companions and many of his family members, was brutally massacred. Husayn's devout standpoint against falsehood and commitment in his stance until the end of his ephemeral life taught every future human being "the lesson of steadfastness".

Yazid – "The Oppressor" – was the son of Mu'awiya, and was born in 21AH/642CE, and inherited the caliphate from his father. In his short ruling of three years, he explicitly contravened the laws of Islam to the extent that historians have reported him as a drunkard amidst reports of bribery and threats. Yazid unjustly demanded the Prophet's grandsons, Husayn, to pledge allegiance to him to ensure his credibility. In addition to slaying Husayn and his followers at Karbala, he is also responsible for commanding the pillage of Medina where he ordered the slaughtering of close to 10,000 Muslims followed by an attack which demolished the Ka'ba – the most sacred place of pilgrimage to the Muslims.



Gandhi (1869 – 1948) Leader of India's independence movement. *"I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind.... I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of Husayn the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission to save Islam. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle."*

He also said: *"I have learned from Husayn how to be oppressed yet victorious."*

Charles Dickens – (1812 – 1870) English novelist, Victorian Era. *"If Husayn had fought to quench his worldly desires, as alleged by certain Christian critics, then I do not understand why his sister, wife, and children accompanied him."*

Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) Famous British historian. *"The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husayn and his companions were rigid believers in God. They illustrated that the numerical superiority does not count when it comes to the truth and the falsehood. The victory of Husayn, despite his minority, marvels me!"*

Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794) considered the greatest British historian of his time. *"In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader. Without his martyrdom, Islam would have extinguished long ago. He was the saviour of Islam and it was due to his martyrdom that Islam took such a deep root, which it is neither possible nor even imaginable to destroy now."*



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASHURA TODAY – CONT'D

oppression. Taking a position of indifference is an invalid attempt at discarding one's responsibility. Ultimately, one will be held accountable. An additional fallacious argument is that of remaining "neutral". Neutrality only weakens the position of truth and justice, consequently strengthening the position of falsehood and injustice. In the epic of Karbala, one can find three groups of people: those aware of the position of truth and rejected it - they were the arrogant oppressors; those aware of the position of truth and accepted it - they were the steadfast party of responsibility; and those who were indifferent, neutral, or acquiescent - history still holds the people of Kufa accountable.

4. Mass Media Bias

Then it was the pulpit, poetry and story telling, now it is the television, radio, newspaper and internet. The medium might change, but the essential propaganda remains the same - that of victimizing the victim and glorifying the oppressor. Thus to properly understand an issue, one must untie his or herself from the bias threads of the media and approach both "sides" of an argument with an open mind. Only then can one begin to ascertain where truth lies.

5. The Need for Principle-Centred Leadership

Sadly, in many instances of leadership, principles are lost to false ambitions. Positions of influence are sought for the desire of fame, power, or fortune as opposed to being motivated by a feeling of responsibility and making a positive difference. Instead of being led by principles, certain leaders are even prepared, as the expression goes, to "shake hands with the devil himself". Husayn provides humanity a standard when he states, "One who is like me does not pay allegiance to the likes of him (Yazid)". This statement transcends personalities into the realm of axioms.

6. Dialogue till the Very Last

The doors of dialogue must remain open. Husayn, till his very last breath, kept the doors open with his enemies. Dialogue supersedes violence, but ultimately the oppressor dictates the nature of the struggle.

Muslim Ibn Aqeel – "Loyal Messenger" – was Husayn's cousin. After Husayn had received numerous letters from the people of Kufa inviting him to migrate there from Medina, Muslim was sent ahead as an envoy to Kufa to see if the people could be trusted to stand by their invitation. He sent word back to Husayn, stating that the Kufans were loyal. Later, to his dismay, the Kufans were forced to switch sides due to threats and intimidation from the Kufan ruler, Ubayd Allah, who was loyal to Yazid. Muslim's loyalty to Husayn stayed with him until his last breath as he fought against Ubaydu'llah's soldiers single-handedly.

Ubaydu'llah Ibn Ziyad – "The Supporter of Oppression" – was the ruler of Kufa. It was by his orders, and by the orders of his superior Yazid, that Husayn was slaughtered in Karbala. He wanted to prevent Husayn from entering Kufa, as this would jeopardise the stability of the city. He ordered the murder of Muslim Ibn Aqeel in Kufa as well.

Hurr Al Tammimi – "The Free Man" – was an officer in Yazid's army. Although he was obeying orders when he intercepted Husayn outside of Kufa, his conscience led him to think about his actions against the family of the Prophet. Prior to the dawn of Ashura, Hurr rode over to Husayn's camp. Hurr threw himself at Husayn's feet pleading for his forgiveness. Husayn immediately forgave him. Later, Hurr fought for Husayn against the army of Yazid and in doing so joined the ranks of the martyrs. If humanity is distinguished by freedom of choice, then Hurr personifies what it means to be human.

Abbas son of Ali – "The Moon of the Hashemites" – also "The Water-Bearer for Karbala's Thirsty" – was the half brother of Husayn and the standard bearer at Karbala. Abbas would never wield his sword unless Husayn would give him permission to do so. In Karbala, Abbas pleaded with Husayn to give him permission to fight. However, Husayn declined his request. Husayn's daughter, Sukayna, made a request of Abbas to gather water for her and

the other children. To fulfill this request, Abbas was granted permission by Husayn, however, Husayn's orders were specific about maintaining peace. Hence, Abbas was killed when he went to the River Euphrates to gather water. His shrine, as with Husayn's, is in Karbala.

Sukayna – “The Thirsty Princess” – only four years old, she was the youngest and most beloved daughter of Husayn. Her lips were parched with thirst at Karbala. Sukayna was crying for her father after his death. Instead of comforting words, she was slapped by Shimr who was one of the henchmen of Yazid's Army. When the tents were set ablaze, Sukayna's dress caught fire. She was kept in jail with her Aunt, Zaynab, where she died in the remembrance of her father. Her Aunt buried her within the confines of the prison.

Ali Al-Asghar – “The Martyred Baby”– was the six-month-old infant son of Husayn. When Husayn was the last survivor and was about to enter the battlefield, he heard Ali Al-Asghar crying. Tormented by the pangs of hunger and thirst, the baby's wailing was unbearable to hear. He took the infant out into the battlefield, thinking that the army surely could not deny an innocent baby a few drops of water. As he held Ali Al-Asghar in his arms requesting water, an arrow was shot, piercing straight through the baby's neck. Most difficult was the moment when Husayn had to return his baby to the mother, Rabab. Both Rabab and Husayn buried their newborn in the land of Karbala.

Zaynab – “The Sanctity of Husayn”– was the sister of Husayn. She was taken prisoner after the battle at Karbala by Ubayd Allah to Yazid. Despite the attempt to humiliate the Household of Prophet Muhammad, she valiantly conducted herself with dignity and courage. She was a steadfast and outspoken woman who shook awake consciousness in the people. She is credited for keeping the message of Husayn alive even after his death – with this was the true victory of Husayn and the Martyrs of Karbala.



Ashura took place over fourteen centuries ago. Why is it then that there is a need for awareness about this today? Why should we remember it? Why should we live it?

1. Ashura as an Enduring Paradigm

It was indeed the case when Husayn's great grandson, Ja'far al-Sadiq expressed, “Every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala.” Wherever there is suffering and injustice, there is Karbala; there is Ashura. In the precious world that we live in, there is not a place or a time in which injustice does not occur. Hence, the tragedy that we speak of is not a page out of history, but a present reality. Mourning Husayn and despising Yazid needs to translate into shedding the tears for today, awakening consciousness, and acting upon it.

2. Ashura on a Personal Level

Ashura relates to every human being's personal struggle with the conscience. One of the reoccurring themes of his tragedy is that of “choice”. Human beings have the distinguishing property of ‘free will’ and with it, the responsibility to choose between truth and falsehood, justice and injustice. This concept is best portrayed by Hurr, who is not found in the middle, equidistant between good and evil, but instead as a commander of the army of evil. Hurr, when his conscience was awakened, underwent an inner revolution. Ultimately, he chose the path of truth and justice. Perhaps most significant of all is that Hurr was not a heavenly character but an ordinary human being who thought that, despite being an employee of a corrupt government, he would not be brought to the precarious position of collaborating with its criminal acts. Indeed Hurr, as his name translates, was a free man who demonstrated through his exercise of free will what it is to be human.

3. No “Neutrality”

Where and when information is accessible, such as the society that we live in today, one cannot ethically excuse themselves from determining the whereabouts of truth and justice from falsehood and

TIMELINE: HUSAYN'S LAST DAYS – CONT'D

left where they fell, denying them a burial.

Yazid's soldiers then loot and plunder the remains of the camp, taking the women and children as prisoners, including Ali (who was severely ill during the battle and thus could not fight), the only surviving son of Husayn.

Karbala and beyond

The captives were taken to Kufa where Zaynab, Husayn's sister is defiant in the face of Ibn Ziyad, one of the battlefield commanders. They are forced to travel to Damascus, where Yazid rejoices over the head of Husayn and insults Ali and Zaynab, the only surviving family members from the massacre of Karbala. They are later released and allowed to return to Medina, for Yazid begins to fear the backlash as news of the massacre spreads.

The survivors from Karbala never forgot what happened in those tragic days for the rest of their lives. They actively preached and continued the message of Husayn and it is thanks to them that today we, too, can take part in this noble cause.

The bloodbath at Karbala, the imprisonment of the women and children of the Household of the Prophet, their display in chains from town to town, and the speeches made by Zaynab, Husayn's sister, all contributed to the end of Yazid's rule and the overthrow of the dynasty of tyranny by awakening a sense of consciousness amongst the people.



TIMELINE: HUSAYN'S LAST DAYS

“O God! Here is the place where our blood will be shed. Here is the place where our graves will be.” - Husayn son of Ali

This is a day-by-day account of Husayn's time in Karbala, leading up to the massacre on Ashura.

Day 1 61 AH (1st October, 680 CE)

Husayn and his followers are prevented from reaching Kufa by Hurr at-Tamini, the caliph Yazid's appointed general, and his 1,000-man army. They are forced to make camp in the desert at Karbala, 75km from Kufa. It is here, at this fateful place, that Husayn and his followers' torment begins.

Day 2

Husayn speaks to his followers at the camp and assures them of their integrity and truthfulness. In return, they pledge their loyalty to him. Then, foreseeing his death, Husayn purchases about four square miles of land from the local residents of the area, to be the site for his and his family's graves.

Day 3

Four thousand additional troops, under the command of Umar ibn Sa'd, arrive with instructions from Ubaydu'llah ibn Ziyad that they should prevent Husayn from leaving until he signs a pledge of allegiance to the Caliph Yazid. Ibn Sa'd's men prepare for battle and surround Husayn's party, cutting them off from the river; their only source for water.

Day 4

Husayn begins negotiations with Ibn Sa'd stressing that he has no desire to initiate bloodshed and asks to be allowed to withdraw to Arabia; however, Ibn Sa'd refuses to relent. Meanwhile the situation at Husayn's camp is becoming extremely difficult due to the lack of water and fresh supplies.



TIMELINE: HUSAYN'S LAST DAYS – CONT'D

Day 5

The size of the army facing Husayn's small band of followers swells, as more troops arrive to join it on the banks of the Euphrates River.

Day 6

The lack of water leads to desperate measures. Husayn uses a tent pole to dig a well, but their relief is short-lived as it dries up. Ibn Ziyad, sensing their anguish, sends 500 troops to reinforce the cordon around the Euphrates.

Day 7

Concerned about the health of the women and children, Husayn asks his brother, Abbas, to conduct a midnight raid past the army to bring back water from the river. Despite a brief skirmish, Abbas brings back some precious water to camp, earning himself the title "Saaqi" or water bearer. The water is a godsend, but does little to assuage the thirst of the entire camp.

Day 8

In desperation, Husayn sends a message to Ibn Sa'd, requesting that they meet. He challenges Ibn Sa'd's allegiance to Yazid by asking him, "Don't you fear God on the Day of Judgement? You know who I am." Ibn Sa'd's loyalty is unshaken; he considers acting as a mediator between Husayn and Yazid, but is dissuaded when his supporters urge him not to compromise.

Day 9

After a long, hot day in the desert, filled with the cries of children for water, Husayn's camp prepares for the attack they anticipate, and are powerless to stop. Husayn gathers his companions together and pleads with them; "Whoever remains with me will be killed tomorrow; so consider this opportunity, as God sent it, and take advantage of the darkness and go home to your villages." He then extinguishes all the lights in the camp to allow those who want to

leave to do so. His followers weep and reply, "*Son of the Messenger of God, if I had to die seventy times for you, I would not leave you. Why should I leave you when I expect to die only once.*"

Husayn sends one last message to Ibn Sa'd asking to be spared one last night so that they can pray to God and recite the Quran. Ibn Sa'd reluctantly agrees. Husayn gathers his followers together for one last sermon. Again, his followers affirm their loyalty and vow to die alongside their master.

Such was the power of their faith, that when the enemy saw them praying, 32 soldiers exchanged sides and joined them, including Hurr, the general of the initial army that had routed Husayn from Kufa. He was later one of the first martyrs to fall.

Day 10 - "Ashura"

Friday 10th Muharram, 61 AH (10th October 680 CE) - On what was to be his last day, Husayn and some of his followers caution Ibn Sa'd's troops for the final time not to shed the blood of the Prophet's house. Leading by example, Ibn Sa'd is the first to shoot an arrow into the small camp. Despite their lack of numbers, Husayn's followers fight ferociously refusing to give up.

Until mid-afternoon, Husayn and his relatives face the heartless army, their defence spent. One by one they fall, including Husayn's sons; aged just 11 and 13. Husayn continues to appeal to the enemy's humanity; he takes his six-month-old infant son and pleads for water. The enemy respond by shooting arrows, which pierce the neck of the baby, instantly killing him.

Ultimately, Husayn is the last left standing, is brought to an end, falling on the battlefield next to his dead comrades. Covered in wounds, Husayn is then decapitated and his body mutilated, in order to be taken to Yazid, as a keepsake. Husayn's followers suffer a similar fate. Their bodies are trampled by enemy horses and