

Al-Husayn b. 'Alī b. 'Abī Ṭālib (a) (Arabic: حسين بن علي بن أبي طالب) (b. Sha'ban 3, 4/January 11, 626 – d. Muharram 10, 61/October 10, 680) was known by the Kunya of Abu 'Abd Allah and also **known as Imam al-Husayn (a)**. He is the third Imam of the Shi'a sect, the martyr of Karbala, one of the People of Kisa' [Cloak], the second son of Imam 'Ali (a) and Lady Fatima (a), and the grandson of the Prophet (s). The Prophet (s) introduced him and his brother, Imam al-Hasan (a), as the Masters of the Youth of Paradise. Imam al-Husayn (a) participated in the battles of Siffin, Jamal and Nahrawan alongside his father.

He obliged to the treaty between his brother and Mu'awiya during its validity. However, after Mu'awiya passed away, Imam al-Husayn (a) refused to give allegiance to Yazid and considered his rise to Caliphate as illegitimate. When Walid b. 'Utba, the governor of Medina, was sent to order Imam al-Husayn (a) to either pledge allegiance to Yazid or be killed, Imam al-Husayn (a) made his way from Medina towards Mecca on Rajab 27, 60/May 6, 680. At the same time, the people of Kufa pledged their support to the Imam (a) as a ruler. As the Imam (a) and his companions made their way to Kufa to gain followers, the army of 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad stopped the Imam's caravan on Yazid's orders. For fear of retribution from Yazid's army, the people of Kufa broke their promise of support for the Imam (a). The battle of Karbala took place on the Day of 'Ashura'. Imam (a) along with his few companions (around 72) were martyred and the remaining companions were taken as prisoners to Kufa and Syria.

The martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (a) was decisive in shaping Islamic and Shi'a history. The timing of the Imam's (a) life and martyrdom were crucial as they were in one of the most challenging periods of the first/seventh century. During this time, Umayyad oppression was rampant, and the stand the Imam (a) and his followers took became a symbol of resistance inspiring future uprisings against oppressors during that time and future generations to come.

Religious sources and social traditions mark the timing of the events of 'Ashura' to fall within the month of Muharram, and that month is the focus of mourning for Shi'a Muslims. The Event of Ashura has inspired a variety of artistic reflections on different levels of Shi'a thoughts, in literature, drawings and symbols for many centuries.^[1]

Lineage

Al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib b. 'Abd al-Muttalib b. Hashim was a Hashemite and from the Quraysh tribe. His father was Imam 'Ali (a) and his mother was Lady Fatima (a), daughter of the Prophet (s).

Birth

Imam al-Husayn (a) was born in Medina. While some have recorded that he (a) was born in 3/625, the most preferred account among historians and scholars is that his birth was in 4/626.

There is no consensus regarding the day the Imam (a) was born but it is believed it was most likely on Sha'ban 3.

Moving towards Iraq

When Imam al-Husayn (a) received Muslim b. 'Aqil's letter, he moved towards Iraq accompanied by his family and companions. On the other hand, when 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad received Yazid's order, moved toward Kufa. Because of his father's history as a ruler of Kufa, he was familiar with the people who were going to rule. He knew what had to be done in order to control the people of Kufa. After he arrived, he began threatening and persuading the famous people of Kufa, and with their help, he began to repress others and used spies to find out where Muslim b. 'Aqil was hidden. He then imprisoned Hani b. 'Urwa who sheltered Muslim b. 'Aqil. Muslim b. 'Aqil and gathered nearly 100,000 individuals to revolt against the ruler, but they abandoned him in less than a day without ever raising arms against 'Ubayd Allah's forces. Muslim was abandoned to the point that when he did his 'Isha' prayer, he prayed in solitary. Finally, 'Ubayd Allah was informed of Muslim b. 'Aqil's hiding place. 'Ubayd Allah's soldiers captured him, killed him and Hani, and beheaded them both. He dragged their headless bodies in the city to scare the people of Kufa into abandoning the cause of Imam al-Husayn (a). Noble men of Kufa became silent and stayed in their houses as if nothing ever happened.

Imam al-Husayn (a) was informed of the martyrdom of Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani b. 'Urwa as well as the betrayal of the people of Kufa on his journey to Iraq. He told his companions about it and gave them permission to leave before arriving to a most certain death. While some left, his relatives, and loyal companions stayed with him. When Imam (a) arrived near Kufa, he encountered the first people of the army of 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, lead by Hurr b. Yazid from Banu Riyah tribe, they blocked the Imam's (a) path towards Kufa in the land of Karbala. When the ruler of Kufa heard that Imam al-Husayn (a) had arrived near Kufa, he sent an army led by 'Umar b. Sa'd. 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad wanted to force Imam al-Husayn (a) to give allegiance to Yazid, but even in the face of death, he (a) refused.

Event of Karbala

When Imam al-Husayn (a) refused to give allegiance to Yazid, the army of 'Umar b. Sa'd prepared to fight against him. They engaged in what would become known as the Battle of Karbala on Muharram 10, 61/October 13, 680 (cf. Day of Ashura, event of Ashura). Imam (a) tried his best to awaken the sleeping consciences of the army standing against him through his altruistic and benevolent speeches. He (a) told them it was their last chance to live free and that if they were to fail this test, they would never find happiness. He told them that if they ignored dignity, a life full of misery awaited them. The early hours of the tenth day was spent sending and receiving messages and giving speeches. Imam al-Husayn (a) and his companions made key speeches that have been recorded in the history showing their spirit of free-mindedness, dignity and piety, the peak of altruism, and benevolence towards ignorant people. Even as death came upon them, they made efforts to save the enemies from themselves. One of Imam al-Husayn's (a) speeches in those crucial hours read,

"O people! Do not hurry! Listen to my words [first]. I wish only good for you. I want to tell you why I have come to your land! If you listen to my words and be fair and see that I tell the truth, this battle which may happen at any moment right now will be cancelled. If you do not listen to me, and if you do not follow the path of truth, you will suffer from its harms. O people, do you know who I am? Do you know who my father is? Is it just for you to kill me? And is it just for you to disrespect me? Am I not the son of the Prophet's (s) daughter? Is not my father the successor and the cousin of the Prophet (s) and the first Muslim? Have not you heard this hadith about me and my brother, where the Prophet (s) said, 'These two are my sons, the masters of the youths in paradise?' If you think I tell the truth, well, to God I swear I have not told a lie since I have known myself. And if you think I tell you lies, still there are few companions of the Prophet (s) alive, so that you can ask them [such as], Jabir b. 'Abd Allah al-Ansari, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Sahl al-Sa'idi, Zayd b. Arqam, and Anas b. Malik! They will tell you that what I say is true. O people! With what religious permission are you going to spill my blood?!"

When the battle finally began, it was only a few hours before Imam al-Husayn (a) and his companions were martyred. The enemy captured their women and children, and took them to Kufa, then onward to Syria. They did not kill Imam al-Sajjad (a) only because he was ill in Karbala.

Martydom

Imam al-Husayn (a) was martyred in Karbala, Iraq on Muharram 10, [the Day of Ashura], 61/October 10, 680 which has been reported to be a Saturday, Sunday, Monday, or most commonly believed,