

# ***THE MASSACRE OF KARBALA FACT SHEET***

## **What is the Massacre of Karbala?**

- It is the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn b. 'Ali (a.s), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), along with his family and companions, by the army of Yazid b. Mu'awiyah. The killing took place in Karbala, Iraq on 10th October 680 C.E (Islamic date: 10th Muharram 61 A.H). This is known as the Day of 'Ashura. The day is commemorated every year by Muslims around the world, particularly Shi'i Muslims.

## **Why is the Massacre of Karbala important?**

- The event represents the battle between justice and injustice and is a timely reminder for every generation to speak out against oppression and safeguard virtue.

## **What happened in Karbala?**

- Al-Husayn refused to give allegiance to Yazid. Yazid's reign as caliph in Arabia had resulted in civil strife, instability, indignity and corruption. He demanded unquestioning allegiance from the people and accept him as their king. Al-Husayn, his family, relatives, and a few followers (numbering approximately 72) refused because Yazid was a tyrant manipulating the notions of good and evil. Yazid decided to force al-Husayn to accept his allegiance or be killed.
- In the end, al-Husayn and his small band of men, women and children (including his six month old infant son by the name of 'Abdallah) were deprived of water for several days. The commander of the Yazid's army abandoned the convention of one-to-one combat, surrounded al-Husayn, and ordered his vastly larger and superior army (up to 30,000 men) to kill him. Al-Husayn was butchered; the few remaining women and children were tortured and enslaved.

## **Why should we know about the Massacre of Karbala today?**

- Today, we live in a world which promotes human rights and we cannot see a person undergo suffering. The Massacre of Karbala shows grave human rights violations took place and just as we remember World War I, II and the Holocaust, it is important to remember this event. Here is the list of violations which took place in relation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR):

<b><i>Incident in Karbala</i></b>	<b><i>Violation of Human Rights</i></b>
The massacre of al-Husayn, his family, the children and his companions	Art 2 of the UDHR guarantees the 'right to life, liberty and security of the person'
Torturing of al-Husayn's companions, women and children	Art 5 prohibits 'torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.
Al-Husayn was not allowed to express his moral and religious views about Yazid and his policies	Art 18 guarantees the 'right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'.
Al-Husayn was constantly prevented from speaking to and getting support from local people in Arabia	Art 20 guarantees the 'right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and no one may be compelled to belong to an association'
Al-Husayn and his followers were not given any type of independent hearing to evaluate their claims	Art 10 states 'everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal'

**Some key sources for the Massacre:** Kitab Maqatal Al-Husayn by Abu Mikhnaf; Kitab al-Irshad by Shaykh al-Mufid; Al-Luhūf 'alā qatlā al-ṭufūf by Sayyid ibn Tawus; Tarikh al-Tabiri

## Facts about Imam al-Husayn ibn Ali (a.s)

- Name: Husayn
- Parents: Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s) & Lady Fatima al-Zahra (a.s)
- Kunya: Aba Abdillah (Father of Abdallah)
- Title: Sayyedush Shuhada (Lord of the Martyrs)
- Birth: 3rd Sha'ban 4 AH in Madinah
- Death: 10th Muharram 61 AH in Karbala
- A saying of Imam Husayn: *"The most forgiving person is the one who forgives in spite of his ability to avenge."*

## Chronology of Events Leading up to the Massacre of Karbala

<i>Day</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i> <i>a.h/c.e</i>	<i>Event</i>
3	Sha'ban	4/625	<b>Birth of Imam Husayn (a.s)</b>
27	Safar	11/632	<b>His grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), dies</b>
21	Ramadan	40/660	<b>His father, 'Ali ibn Talib (a.s), is killed</b>
7	Safar	50/670	<b>His brother, Hasan ibn Ali (a.s) poisoned to death</b>
27	Rajab	60/680	<b>Yazid ibn Muawiyah demands allegiance of Husayn</b> or he faces death. Husayn refuses to give allegiance because Yazid is an immoral and oppressive man who is corrupting society, violating the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's message, striking terror into people.
28	Rajab	60/680	<b>The Imam leaves Madinah at night</b>
3	Sha'ban	60/680	<b>The Imam arrives at Makkah</b> and expresses to his brother, Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah that his purpose in refusing allegiance is not to create discord or corruption but save the principles of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali and to enjoin good and prohibit that which is forbidden.
10	Ramadan	60/680	<b>People of Kufah, Iraq, invite the Imam</b> and tell him they will Support him
15	Ramadan	60/680	<b>Muslim ibn Aqil, a cousin of Imam Husayn, goes to Kufah</b> as Imam's messenger to communicate with people of Kufa
5	Shawwal	60/680	<b>Muslim ibn Aqil arrives in Kufah</b>
8	DhulHijjah	60/680	<b>Muslim ibn Aqil betrayed</b> by many Kufans & killed on the order of Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa who also threatens any Kufan that supports Imam Husayn. He also orders the death of Hani ibn 'Urwah, the person who Muslim ibn Aqil stayed with in Kufa.

- 8 DhulHijjah 60/680 **Imam leaves from Makkah to Kufah to avoid bloodshed since Yazid's soldiers intend to kill him. But during his journey, he sees there is little support for him from the people of Kufa.**
- 2 Muharram 61/680 **Imam arrives in *Karbāla'*, Iraq**
- 3 Muharram 61/680 **4000 additional troops arrive for 'Umar Ibn Sa'd.** He has instructions from Ubaydu'llah ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, that they should prevent Husayn from leaving until he signs a pledge to the Caliph, Yazid. Ibn Sa'd's men prepare for battle and surround Husayn's party, cutting them off from the River Euphrates, their only source of water.
- 4 Muharram 61/680 **Imam Husayn informs 'Umar ibn Sa'd** that bloodshed should be avoided but Ibn Sa'd insists on Husayn's (a.s) allegiance.
- 7 Muharram 61/680 **'Umar bin Sa'd refuses Imam Husayn's camp water**

### **Night of Ashura**

- 9 Muharram 61/680 After a long, hot day in the desert filled with the cries of children for water, Husayn's camp prepares for the attack they know is coming 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 Allah sent 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, "Oh master do not thus shame us before Allah..were we to desert you, may the wild beasts of the jungle tear us to pieces."

**Day of Ashura:** Massacre of Imam Husayn and his followers on the plains of Karbala. Reports say that Yazid has up to 30,000 men and Husayn had approximately 72 men.

- 10 Muharram 61/680 Qasim bin al-Hasan, Aun and Muhammad, Ali al-Akbar, Abbas bin Ali are all brutally killed. Ali al-Asghar, Imam Husayn's (a.s) 6-month old son is denied water and killed by an arrow shot by Harmalah. Shimr bin Jawshan kills Imam Husayn, cutting off his head. Imam Husayn's son, Ali (the 4<sup>th</sup> Imam), is unable to fight because of severe illness.

After the killings, the tents are looted, jewellery is removed from the women and Imam Husayn's (a.s) head is kept to be taken to Yazid in Damascus.

### **Departing from Karbala:**

- 11 Muharram 61/680 Imam Husayn's (a.s) family including Lady Zaynab (a.s), Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a.s) and Lady Sakina (a.s) are taken as prisoners to Kufa and then eventually to Damascus. They are eventually released after Zaynab's sermons and pressure from Yazid's court.

## Key people

### ***Imam Husayn's camp:***

- Abbas ibn Ali (brother of Imam Husayn)
- Ali Akbar (son of Imam Husayn)
- Qasim (son of Imam Hasan)
- Aun and Muhammad (sons of Lady Zaynab)
- Imam Zayn al-Abidin (son of Imam Husayn and 4<sup>th</sup> Shi'i Imam)
- Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (son of Imam Zayn al-Abidin and 5<sup>th</sup> Shi'i Imam)
- Lady Zaynab (sister of Imam Husayn)
- Lady Umm al-Kulthum (daughter of Imam Ali a.s)
- Lady Sakina (daughter of Imam Husayn)
- Ali Asghar (6 month old son of Imam Husayn)
- Muslim bin Aqil (cousin of Imam Husayn)
- Hani ibn 'Urwah (companion of Imam Husayn)
- Habib ibn Madhahir (companion of Imam Husayn)
- Muslim bin Awsajah (companion of Imam Husayn)
- Qays ibn Mushir (messenger of Imam Husayn)
- Nafi' bin Hilal al-Jamali (companion of Imam Husayn)
- Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn al-Bajal (companion of Imam Husayn)
- Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi (changed sides and joined Imam Husayn's army)
- Wahb and Haniyyah (young married Christian couple that joined Husayn's camp)
- Qamar (Wahb's mother, a Christian)
- John bin Huwai (a Christian who joined Husayn's army. He was former slave of Abu Dhar)

### ***Yazid's camp***

- Umr ibn Sa'd (commander of Yazid's army)
- Shimr ibn Dhil-Jawshan (killer of Imam Husayn)
- Harmala (killer of Ali Asghar)
- Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad (governor of Kufa)
- Marwan ibn Hakam (told to obtain allegiance from Imam Husayn. 4<sup>th</sup> Umayyad caliph)
- Up to approximately 30,000 soldiers

## Quotes by Non-Muslims on the Massacre of Karbala

- **Mahatma Gandhi** (Indian political and spiritual leader) writes: "I learned from Hussein how to achieve victory while being oppressed."
- **Charles Dickens** (English novelist) writes: "If Husain had fought to quench his worldly desires...then I do not understand why his sister, wife, and children accompanied him. It stands to reason...therefore, that he sacrificed purely for Islam."
- **Antoine Bara** (Lebanese writer) writes: "No battle in the modern and past history of mankind has earned more sympathy and admiration as well as provided more lessons than the martyrdom of Husayn in the battle of Karbala." (from Husayn in Christian Ideology)
- **Thomas Carlyle** (Scottish historian and essayist): "The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husain and his companions were the rigid believers of God. They illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husain despite his minority marvels me!" (from Hero and Hero-worship)
- **Edward Gibbon** (British historian): "In a distant age and clime the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader." "In the history of Islam, especially the life of Imam Husayn stand unique, unapproached and unapproachable by anyone. 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."(from the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

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