



**6** Facts about  
Imam Hussain (AS)  
that Prove Him as a  
Role Model for the  
Humankind



# Introduction

A question anyone might ask after reading about the event of Karbala is 'why didn't Imam Hussain (AS) take an oath of allegiance to Yazid to save his life? Why did he choose to be martyred?'

One clear answer to this question is that he was the perfect leader (Imam) and role model for the Muslim community. A role model is someone who serves as an example and whose behavior is emulated by other people. To be a good role model, you have to observe all your acts so that you set proper examples for others to follow.

Now, if Imam Hussain (AS) had pledged allegiance to Yazid's tyranny, would he be a good exemplar of resistance against injustice for people? Wouldn't his compromise then make the tyrant ruler more powerful and dominant?

In what follows, we will bring some more facts about Imam Hussain (AS) that reveals his perfect character as a role model for humankind.

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# 1 Imam Hussain (AS) Was a Courageous Leader

Imam Hussain (AS) was courageous in the true sense of the word because he:

## •Stood up against What Was Wrong

Imam Hussain (AS), saw the injustice that was imposed upon the society of his time and realized how what the rulers called Islam was far from the true teachings of Islam. Oppression, tyranny, unjust use of public property, etc. made life miserable for people.

So, instead of remaining silent and doing nothing, he decided to improve the society. He practiced courage in standing up against what was wrong, and in accepting the dangers of his decision.

Surrendering to and accepting the injustice and oppression, is considered a huge sin

in Islam for someone capable of standing up against it and can improve the situation. That is one of the reasons why enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong (Amr bi-l-ma'ruf and Nahy'ani-l-munkar) are among the practical principles of Islam; to improve society and bring awareness to people.



## •Took risks, but not at the Expense of Transgressing Human Values:

Imam Hussain (AS) was courageous and stood up against what was wrong. But he never gave up his human virtues for the sake of furthering his purpose. In other words, for Imam Hussain (AS), "the end does not justify the means." While his enemy was impatient to start the war, he did his best to prevent it by negotiating and bringing awareness to them [1].



starting a war with the enemy was not the end. Instead, leading them to what is right, toward a life of honor and dignity rather than humiliation and oppression, was his ultimate purpose. Imam Hussain (AS), tried to show that being just is far more important than being courageous. If everyone is just, then no right would be taken away, and you do not need to be courageous to stand up against it [i].

According to Imam Ali (AS), courage is dependent upon three virtues which complement each other. These are self-sacrifice, not bowing down to humiliation and oppression, and not being after making a name for yourself [2]. In his movement, Imam Hussain (AS) exhibited all these virtues. He sacrificed his life and family, did not surrender to the injustice his enemies were imposing, and never cared about his fame but was entirely devoted to Allah's cause [ii].

## •Insisted on His Right Cause, not any Cause

In Islam, the intention always comes before the action. Imam Hussain (AS) knew well why he was taking action. For him, nothing was more important than Allah's satisfaction and reviving the true teachings and peaceful message of Islam in the corrupt society of his time [iii].

He was courageous for the right cause. Neither was he after usurping the throne, nor manipulating people for his own sake. In that case, he would not be courageous anymore but selfish. As Charles Dickens admitted, "If Husain (as) 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" [6].



## •Was Cautious in his Courage

Imam Hussain (AS) did take a risk in furthering his purpose, but he never acted unwisely and on his whim. When people sent thousands of letters from Kufa to Imam Hussain (AS), to ask for his help and declare their devotion to him, he did not accept their invitation immediately.

Instead, he first sent a representative to their city to validate their claim. Also, on the day of Ashura, despite his enemy's insistence on war, and while he was not afraid of fighting with them, he first tried to reason with them.

You cannot be called courageous if you let go of your insight and wisdom and act recklessly [iv].

### •**Despite His Strength was not after Making War**

As said earlier, Imam Hussain (AS) was not willing to go to war with his enemy. While he was fully capable of fighting with them, and he courageously did it with only 72 people against thousands, he was never in favor of making war without any good reason. He was a courageous leader and guide, not a ruthless tyrant.

Thus, he first tried to guide his enemy toward the true teachings of Islam through speaking and reasoning, but when he saw their insistence on being ignorant, he was forced into a war.

### •**Was Strong and Patient when he was faced with Difficulty**

It takes courage and spiritual strength to endure the pain of losing your beloved ones. Imam Hussain (AS) lost many of his family members and friends in the battle of Karbala, including his brother and two of his sons. However, while he felt a deep pain in his heart, he never lost his control and power of reason.

And he never regretted his action, nor doubted his cause. He was sure that what he did was for the sake of Allah's satisfaction, and his movement will forever inspire those who are seeking what is right.



## 2 The End Did Not Justify the Means for Imam Hussain (AS)

As stated above, Imam Hussain (AS) never disregarded human values on his way to achieving his purpose. And he always advised his followers to choose the right way in life. For him, the end did not justify the means. What mattered to him more than anything else was the values, not the victory in its apparent sense.

As Imam Ali (AS) says: “The victory achieved through sins is not, in fact, a victory, the one who dominates with the help of evil is defeated” [10].

It is due to this ethical principle that Muslim ibn Aqil did not kill his enemy, Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, before the event of Karbala (before the enemy declared war against them), when he had every chance of doing so in his friend’s house.

He did not kill him because the Holy Prophet (PBUH) forbade any guile: “Verily, Islam became an obstruction of deceit and an obstacle of trickery” [11]. Imam Hussain (AS) and his companions were seeking to revive the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (AS). So, killing even the most wicked person on earth through deceit, and before he has shown an act of hostility against you, is not compatible with Islamic teachings.



In another account from the event of Karbala, Zuhayr, one of Imam Hussain (AS)'s companions, recommended fighting the enemy when they were fewer in number and so easier to defeat. But Imam Hussain (AS) replied he did not intend to start a war; [he would rather defend if a war were imposed on him].

### **3 Imam Hussain (AS) Would Always Do the Right Thing**

Some people criticize Imam Hussain (AS)'s decision, saying he could have pledged allegiance to Yazid while at the same time trying to fight him and his injustice over time.

This would also contradict Imam Hussain (AS)'s maxim and is paradoxical, too. In fact, Yazid's deviations from true Islam and the moral norms were so many that Imam Hussain (AS) could not turn a blind eye to them.

Imam Hussain (AS) did not want to compromise with those so-called Muslims whose behavior and actions had nothing to do with Islam. Instead, he chose to do the right thing, which any free-spirited, wise, and virtuous man would do. And with his movement, he invited us all to do the same and follow in his footsteps.



## **4 Imam Hussain (AS) Was Martyred to Preserve Human Dignity**

As a great role model, Imam Hussain (AS) only wanted to restore what was right, the true teachings of Islam which had been distorted by the tyrant ruler of the time. He tried to preserve human dignity and values. He could have saved his life as well as that of his family's and companions' by accepting Yazid's allegiance. But this would have been at the cost of ruining their dignity and living a life humiliation. Never would he put up with such disgrace.

So Imam Hussain (AS) made the most of every opportunity to invite people to righteousness and prevent bloodshed. However, when he was left with two options, humiliation or death, and the war was being forced upon him, he chose martyrdom and bravely fought against injustice.

## **5 Imam Hussain (AS) Was against War**

Looking at Imam Hussain (AS)'s movement and the incidents that took place in Karbala, one might wonder if Imam Hussain (AS) ever had the intention of going to war with Yazid or not. The answer to the following questions will clarify this matter.

### **•Why Would He Leave Medina to Mecca?**

He did not wish to take the oath of allegiance of a ruthless and corrupt person as Yazid, so he decided to peacefully migrate from Medina to Mecca in which many people had not accepted Yazid's oath of allegiance yet. In his will which he wrote before leaving Medina, he says:

"I am not leaving here out of selfishness or with the aim of oppression or corruption, but for the sake of improving Muslims' condition of life. I want to enjoin the right (Amr bi-l-

ma'ruf) and forbid the wrong (Nahy' ani-l-munkar) and to act according to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s and Imam Ali's (AS) way".

### •Why Did He Take All His Property and His Family with Him?

His first motivation to leave Medina was migration, not war. So he left Medina to Mecca along with his family and companions without making any violent move against Yazid. On the day of Ashura on which Imam Hussain (AS) was martyred, 17 to 19 people of his family and relatives were among his companions, including some women and children. Among the martyrs of Karbala, also, there were five teenagers and children. One might ask, as Charles Dickens once asked if Imam Hussain (AS) were after worldly desires as taking over the throne, why would he take his family and children with him and risk their lives?

### •Why Would He even Go to Kufa? Should He Have Left Kufa People's Letters Unresponded?

Imam Hussain (AS) had no intention of going to Kufa, but he was persuaded to do so by the many letters he received from Kufa people asking him to help them against Yazid's tyranny. His speech in front of Hur's army proves this fact:



“O’ people! This is my last word to you so that there would be no excuse in Allah’s presence. I would not come to you if you had not sent your letters and messengers and asked me to come to you. You told me that you didn’t have a leader and wanted Allah to guide you through me. So, if you still keep your words, I will come to your city, and if you don’t want me to come, I will return.”

### •Why Did He Refuse to Fight with Hur’s Army Despite His Strength?

When surrendered by Hur and his army, Zuhair, one of Imam Hussain’s (AS) companions, suggested fighting them. Since they were not still much in number and Imam Hussain’s (AS) camp had the strength to defeat them. However, Imam Hussain (AS) rejected his view and told him that if there would be a war, he did not wish to be its initiator, though he would defend himself if necessary.

### •Why Would He Wish to Postpone the War even for One More Day?

Imam Hussain (AS) wanted to postpone the war as much as possible, not because he was afraid of fighting, but to give the enemy more time to think twice about their wrong decision. So, when on the evening of the 9th of Muharram, Umar ibn Sa’ad gathered his army and got them ready for the war, he sent them a message and asked them to postpone the war until the day after and he spent the night praying to Allah.

Even on the very day of Ashura, Imam Hussain (AS) did his best to dissuade the enemy of choosing the wrong path and losing the God-given blessing of life for a ruthless tyrant as Yazid and his vain intentions. That is because Imam Hussain (AS) who was the spiritual leader of Muslims and cared about their fate more than his own life, found it his responsibility to guide them toward what is right before it was too late [v].



## 6 Imam Hussain (AS) Demonstrated Democracy in His Movement

One of the questions that arises about Imam Hussain's (AS) movement, which is of great importance especially in the modern days, is whether he desired to form an Islamic community, and if so whether the people willingly wanted to accept his leadership or not. In other words, did Imam Hussain (AS) actually want to rule over the Islamic

community? Did he seek power? Did people join Imam Hussain (AS) of their own free will or they were forced, enticed or threatened to do so? The answers will reveal the core message of Imam Hussain (AS)'s revolution for us today.

### • Imam Hussain (AS) Was Not After Power and Leadership

Imam Hussain (AS) had the same attitude toward power as his father. He did not seek a leadership role unless, for the sake of eliminating injustice and corruption from the community. And that's why Imam Hussain did not take the oath of allegiance to Yazid, the ruthless caliph of that time.

Clearly, it is every individual's duty to fight against oppression and injustice in society. In other words, standing against tyranny is a moral and virtuous act in itself that is not entirely dependent on the companionship of others. However, when it comes to

the issue of gaining power or accepting people's leadership to fight against tyranny, the morality and value of this uprising depend on whether the leader is merely seeking reformation, or he struggles to gain supremacy over people. Such arrogance in leadership, in the latter case, can be eliminated by the presence of people.

### •Imam Hussain (AS) Was Chosen and Invited by People

When people of Kufa heard Imam Hussain (AS) had not pledged allegiance to Yazid's



thousands of letters to Imam Hussain (AS) asking him to go there and serve as their leader to fight against the tyranny. He did not take their request for granted, nor did he accept their invitation right away. Instead, he decided to send his representative, Muslim ibn Aqil, to them to confirm their loyalty. That's because in Islam, the relationship between people and the government is a two-way street. On one way is the voting public -those who decide who becomes their leader and have to be loyal to him- and on the other path is the government, who also needs to be loyal to people and care about their well-being. And this is one of the important aspects of democracy in its true sense of the word.

Here another aspect of Imam Hussain's (AS) movement is revealed which is beyond the mere fight against oppression: the necessity which made Imam Hussain (AS) decide to take power, i.e., people's will and invitation.

## •He Accepted People's Request

Imam Hussain (AS) thought it was necessary to accept the people's leadership because they had asked him to do so.

If Imam Hussain (AS) had sought supremacy, he would have accepted people's leadership at any cost. But he fulfilled what God told him in the Holy Quran:

"Do not be like those who left their homes vainly and to show off to the people, and to bar [other people] from the way of Allah" (8:47)

He also said: "Indeed, I have not risen to make mischief, neither as an adventurer nor to cause corruption and tyranny. I have risen solely to seek the reform of the Ummah of my grandfather (PBUH)" [12].

He expressed it manifestly in his speeches that he would accept people's leadership

only if the elites of the community were all agreed on that invitation. He repeated it once again when he was faced with Hur's army on his way to Kufa and emphasized that the people of Kufa had invited him by sending thousands of letters and requested him to take over the affairs. He explicitly stated that if the people of Kufa regretted their decision, he would return. He did not want to impose himself on people!



## •Disloyalty of Kufa People to Imam Hussain (AS)

People of Kufa had invited Imam Hussain (AS), they had chosen him as their leader. But they were too weak to stand for what they had asked for. They were threatened and enticed by the tyrant governor of Kufa and could not keep their promise. Their hearts were with Imam Hussain (AS), but in practice, their swords were against him. They left Imam Hussain's (AS) side and so the democracy they wished for was not materialized among them.

## •A Failed Wish for Democracy

In the Islamic view of democracy, there has to be a balance between the rights and duties of both people and the rulers. Otherwise, there would be a disaster.

Many times in a democratic scene, there is a ruler who oppresses a lot of people. However, in the tragic story of Imam Hussain

(AS), there is a group of people who choose and invite their leader, and promise to support him but go back on their pledge and fight against him, which ultimately resulted in the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS), one of the most righteous people on earth.





# The Last Word

If we hate oppression and wish to stand against it, we need a guide to know how to behave in different situations; when to negotiate, when to disagree, when to yell our beliefs, when to make our movement revolutionary and call others to assist us, when to make peace, and finally when is the time to fight against the oppressor?

It is hard to find a true answer to all the above questions when we face the oppressors. But revising the history of Karbala and studying Imam Hussain's (AS) behavior in a different situation can help us find the choice when we face similar conditions, as he has gone through the same path. We can perceive through reading the history that Imam Hussain (AS) did not tend to start a fight from the beginning.

Hussain (AS) does not belong to Muslims only. His behavior and lifestyle represent a way of life for all humans who wish to live a prosperous life. It is in the nature of all human beings who hate oppression and cruelty and would like to stand against it. Hussain (AS) teaches us to have courage and chivalry in life. That is why he faced the army of the enemy on the tenth day of Muharram and said, "If you do not believe in any religion and do not fear the resurrection day, at least be free men in this world." This saying clearly shows that Hussain's teachings are not limited to Muslims only, but his way of life can be a role model for all of those who wish to live a humane life.

## Notes:

[i] Imam Ali (AS) said, " Justice is better than courage. Since if every person is just toward other people, then they won't need to be courageous" [9]

[ii] On the cause of his movement, Imam Hussain (AS) said,"O God! Surely you know that whatever we did was not a competition to gain worldly positions and not for the worthless physical attractions of the world. But to show the signs of religious ways and to remove corruption from your lands, so that the oppressed feel secured and act according to your traditions and rules." [3]

[iii] Imam Hussain (AS) said, "My revolution aims to reform the society and revive the true teachings of Islam." [4]

[iv] Imam Ali (AS) said, " negligence and not having foresight, spoils the courage" [8].

[v] For more information see Salam Islam's ebook: 40 Points about Imam Hussain (AS) and the Event of Karbala

## References:

[1] al-Shaykh al-Mufid, al-Irshad, p.253.

[2] Ibn Shu'ba al-Harrani, Tuhaf al-ʾuqul, p.322.

[3] Ibid. p.239.

[4] Ibid. p.243.

[5] The Islamic Axioms, retrieved from <https://www.salamislam.com/content/islamic-axioms/1>

[6] <https://www.goodreads.com>

[7] Abd al-Wāhid b. Muḥammad al-Āmidī, Ghurar al-hikam wa durar al-kalim, p.375.

[8] Ali ibn Muhammad Laithi Vaseti, Oyun al-Hikmah va al-Mavaez, p. 182.

[9] Ibn Abi al-Hadid, The interpretation of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol 20, p.333.

[10] Allamah Sharif Razi, Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 327

[11] Tahdhib al-Ahkam, vol. 10, p. 214; Al-Kafi, vol. 7, p. 375

[12] [www.al-islam.org](http://www.al-islam.org)

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