

2.5 Imām Husayn’s Resistance against Oppression

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Describe the circumstances around the birth of Imām Husayn ﷺ and Prophet Muḥammad’s love for him.
- Outline the ways in which Imām Husayn ﷺ supported the leadership (*Imāmah*) of his brother, Imām Ḥasan ﷺ.
- Analyze the reasons for Imām Husayn’s stance against Yazīd.
- Explain why the visitation (*ziyārah*) of the grave of Imām Husayn ﷺ holds such a high status.

AN OVERVIEW OF IMĀM ḤUSAYN ﷺ

Name	Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ
Kunyah	Abū ‘Abdillāh
Title	Sayyid ash-Shuhadā’
Parents	Imām ‘Alī ﷺ and Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ
Date of Birth	3rd Sha‘bān 4 AH
Birthplace	Medina, Arabia
Duration of Imāmah	10 years
Date of Martyrdom	10th Muḥarram 61 AH
Place of Martyrdom	Karbalā’, Iraq
Cause of Martyrdom	Beheaded on the Day of ‘Āshūrā’
Lifespan	57 years
Location of Shrine	Karbalā’, Iraq

TIMELINE OF IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN ﷺ

4 AH
626 AD

Birth of
Imām al-Ḥusayn ﷺ



11 AH
634 AD

Riḥlah of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ



During Imāmah
of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ



BIRTH TO THE RIḤLAH OF THE NOBLE PROPHET ﷺ: 3rd Sha‘bān 4 AH to 28th Ṣafar 11 AH (6 ½ Years)

The blessed birth of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ took place on the 3rd of Sha‘bān in the 4th year after the migration (*hijrah*). The house of the Prophet ﷺ was overcome with joy when Angel Jibrā‘īl descended to congratulate the Prophet ﷺ, and inform him that Allah ﷻ had chosen a name for this baby which was Ḥusayn, meaning ‘goodness.’

The Noble Prophet ﷺ always gave Imām Ḥasan ؑ and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ a lot of love and attention. He wanted everyone to know his grandsons, because they would be the leaders of the Muslims after him. He would frequently be heard saying:

حُسَيْنٌ مِنِّي وَ أَنَا مِنْ حُسَيْنٍ أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ أَحَبَّ حُسَيْنًا
 “Ḥusayn is from me, and I am from Ḥusayn.
 May Allah love the one who loves Ḥusayn.”¹

One day, the Prophet ﷺ put Imām Ḥusayn ؑ on his shoulders and announced: “O people! I know that after me, you are going to have differences. This is Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī! His lineage is the best of lineages; his grandfather is the Prophet, and his grandmother is Khadijah. What has been given to him has not been given to anybody else!”²

He made it very clear to the people who this boy was, and how they should treat him. He was even heard saying: “Anyone who wants to know how a youth in Paradise will look like, (they should) look at Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī.”³

1 Tirmidhī, Muḥammad, *Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 2, P. 306.

2 Dāneshnāmeḥ Imam Hussein bar Pāye Quran, Hadith va Tāriḫ, Vol. 2, P. 21.

3 ‘Allāmah Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol. 37, P. 75.

RIḤLAH: death
SHAHĀDAH: martyrdom
IMĀMAH: leadership



40 AH
661 AD

50 AH
670 AD

60 AH
680 AD

During Imāmah
of Imām Ḥasan ؑ

Start of his own Imāmah

Departure from Medina

Martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn ؑ





MA'SŪMĪN:
the Immaculate beings

MA'RIFAH:
deep understanding

NŪR: light

RAḤMAH: mercy

RIḤLAH OF THE PROPHET ﷺ TO SHAHĀDAH OF IMĀM'ALĪ ﷺ: 28th Şafar 11 AH to the 21st of the month of Ramaḍān, 40 AH

In the year 11 AH, on the 28th of Şafar, the final Prophet ﷺ passed away. His death was extremely difficult for his family—not only because he was their beloved family member, but he was also their esteemed Prophet ﷺ. For the Immaculate beings (*Ma'sūmīn*) who have deep understanding (*ma'rifah*) about the best person on Earth, meaning the Prophet ﷺ, this was very difficult for them to bear. They could feel the light (*nūr*) and mercy (*raḥmah*) of the Prophet ﷺ leave this Earth.



STOP AND REFLECT: How can we work on attaining a deeper understanding (*ma'rifah*) to gain a better awareness of the Prophet ﷺ and the Imāms ﷺ, even though we cannot see them?

After the Prophet ﷺ left this world, his entire family including his grandsons were heartbroken. The oppressive rulers did not allow Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ and her family to publicly mourn for the Prophet ﷺ. According to some narrations, due to the magnitude of the loss faced by the Ahlul Bayt ﷺ at the loss of the seal of the Prophets and the best creation, Imām 'Alī ﷺ built Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ a place called *Bayt al-Aḥzān* in the Baqī' Cemetery on the outskirts of Medina so that they could mourn and grieve for their beloved Prophet ﷺ. During the day, Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ used to take her children to this shelter, and then Imām 'Alī ﷺ would bring them back home at sunset. According to some reports, after twenty-seven days of her father's demise, Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ could not go there anymore due to her illness.⁴



STOP AND REFLECT: Why would the rulers of that time prevent the Ahlul Bayt ﷺ from outwardly mourning for the Prophet ﷺ?

The rulers were afraid that if the other people heard the family of the Prophet ﷺ crying, their hearts might soften toward them. People might start to recognize who truly had the right to rulership. Thus, they came up with various strategies to prevent the general public from understanding the great status of the Ahlul Bayt ﷺ.

These young boys, namely Imām Ḥasan ﷺ and Imām Ḥusayn ﷺ, and their sisters also had to see the oppression that their parents suffered at the hands of the rulers of that time.

4 *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 43, P. 177.

Imām Ḥusayn ؑ was alongside his brother when their mother, Sayyidah Fāṭimah ؑ, would go to each house in the city and remind the people how they pledged allegiance to Imām ‘Alī ؑ during the event of Ghadīr. Imām Ḥusayn ؑ did anything in his power to help his mother and father stand up to the oppressors of that time, and he would tell the people who their true leaders were.

Soon after the death of their grandfather, the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, their mother, Sayyidah Fāṭimah ؑ also passed away.

Imām Ḥusayn ؑ continued to stand up to the oppressors—both publicly and privately. His public resistance to injustice can be seen when he would go to the oppressors’ palace and say: “Come down from my father’s pulpit!” He was not afraid to stand up for the truth, and placed his complete trust in Allah ﷻ, even in a situation that was dangerous for a child.



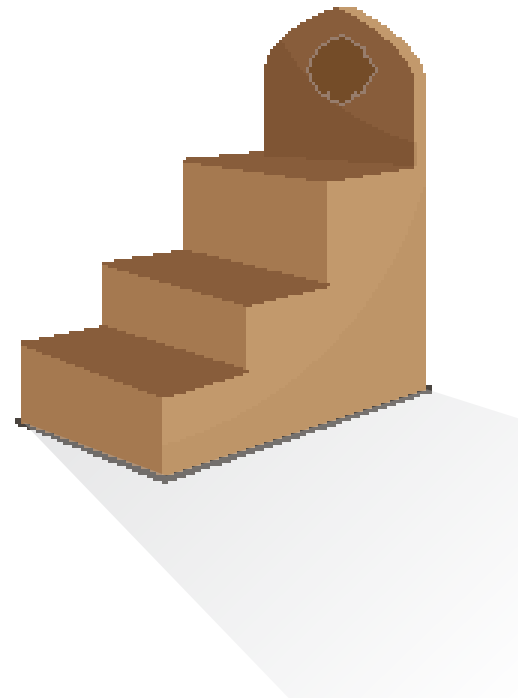
STOP AND REFLECT: If you lived during that time, what are some of the ways in which you might have supported Imām ‘Alī ؑ?

Throughout the reign of the first three caliphs, Imām Ḥusayn ؑ would make sure that he spread information about the injustices that the people faced, and would help guide the community to the way of justice and truth. He saw his father’s sincere companions being banished away from the city, and would go to visit them even when people warned him about the dangers of doing so, because he knew that they were on the right path.

When Imām ‘Alī ؑ finally became the caliph and people came to give him allegiance (*bay’ah*), Imām ‘Alī ؑ asked both Imām Ḥasan ؑ and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ to go up to the pulpit (*minbar*) and give a speech.⁵

Then, Imām ‘Alī ؑ himself went up and addressed the people:

“O people! These are the grandsons of the Prophet ﷺ! They are his trusts (*amānāt*) that I give to you. O people, know that the Prophet ﷺ has told you about their importance many times!”⁶



BAY’AH: allegiance

MINBAR: pulpit

AMĀNĀT: trusts

5 Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, P. 307.

6 *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, P. 308.

Imām Ḥasan ؑ and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ continued resisting oppression even during their father’s leadership. A lot of the oppressors became more vocal as they tried to prevent Imām ‘Alī ؑ from spreading justice throughout the Islamic world, and they started many civil wars. Both of these young Imāms defended their father in the battles of Jamal, Ṣiffīn, and Nahrawān. During these battles, Imām Ḥusayn ؑ would stand up and give sermons, reminding the enemy about who Imām ‘Alī ؑ was, and who they were fighting against.⁷



STOP AND REFLECT: How did these battles show the extreme injustices that the Muslims faced after the death of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ?

SHAHĀDAH OF IMĀM‘ALĪ ؑ TO SHAHĀDAH OF IMĀM ḤASAN ؑ

NŪRUN WĀḤĪD: one light

ZIYĀRAH: visitation

RIZQ: sustenance

SAĀDAH: true prosperity

As we learned in the previous chapter on the life of Imām Ḥasan ؑ, the 21st night of the month of Ramaḍān was very difficult for the sons of Imām ‘Alī ؑ. After burying their father, Imām Ḥasan ؑ and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ headed to the *masjid*. There, Imām Ḥasan ؑ announced his position as the next Imām, and took the oath of allegiance (*bay‘ah*) from the people.

When Imām Ḥasan ؑ decided to sign the peace treaty with Mu‘āwiyah, many people actually tried to provoke and persuade Imām Ḥusayn ؑ to oppose his brother. But Imām Ḥusayn ؑ knew that his brother had made the right decision, so he told them: “My brother is my Imām.”⁸



STOP AND REFLECT: What reasons led to Imām Ḥasan’s ؑ decision to make a peace treaty? What factors might influence how we would react to oppression?

1

Imām Ḥusayn ؑ stood firmly in support of his older brother, as a way of resisting the caliphate of those who were not entitled to have it. He made it clear who the Imām was, and who everyone should turn to for their decisions. He also showed the people that he himself was following the orders of Imām Ḥasan ؑ. He wanted to convey that *Imāmah* is from Allah ﷻ. The Imāms were all from one light (*nūrun wāḥid*) so all of their decisions were like one person’s decisions, since they were in direct accordance with Allah’s will.

⁷ Ibn Abil Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, Vol. 2, P. 186.

⁸ Al-Kashshī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, Vol. 1, P. 110.

According to the peace treaty between Imām Ḥasan ؑ and Mu'āwiyah, Mu'āwiyah was not allowed to appoint a successor. However, he had no intention of abiding by the treaty. He ordered Imām Ḥasan ؑ to be poisoned, and after killing the second Imām ؑ, Mu'āwiyah thought he had an open path to do whatever he wished—except for one obstacle: Imām Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ؑ, who would not allow the religion of his grandfather to be tainted by corrupt, power hungry oppressors.

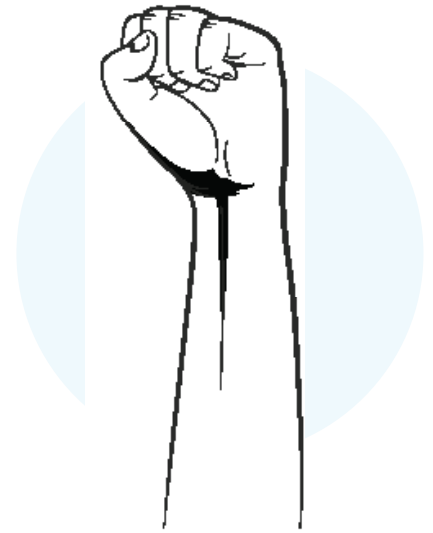
We can see that Imām Ḥusayn ؑ did not just stand up to oppression in the desert of Karbalā', but that his whole life was spent in the servitude of Allah ﷻ, which included resistance to injustice throughout his entire life.



STOP AND REFLECT: In what ways was Imām Ḥusayn ؑ standing up for the people at all times by resisting injustice?

In one of his speeches before departing Mecca to go toward Karbalā', the Imām ؑ said:

“I have taken this stand not out of arrogance or pride, nor out of mischief or injustice. I have risen to seek reformation in the community of my grandfather. I would like to bid good and forbid evil, and follow the tradition of my grandfather, and my father, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.”⁹



The status of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ is so high that it is advised for us to do his visitation (*ziyārah*) frequently. Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq ؑ said to a companion:

*Never set aside the ziyārah of Imām Ḥusayn, and tell your companions to do the same, for if you are able to do that, then Allah will increase your life, and increase your sustenance (riqā), and you will live a life of happiness, and die in a state of happiness, and Allah will consider you to be one who has reached true prosperity (sa'ādah).*¹⁰



9 *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 44, P. 327.

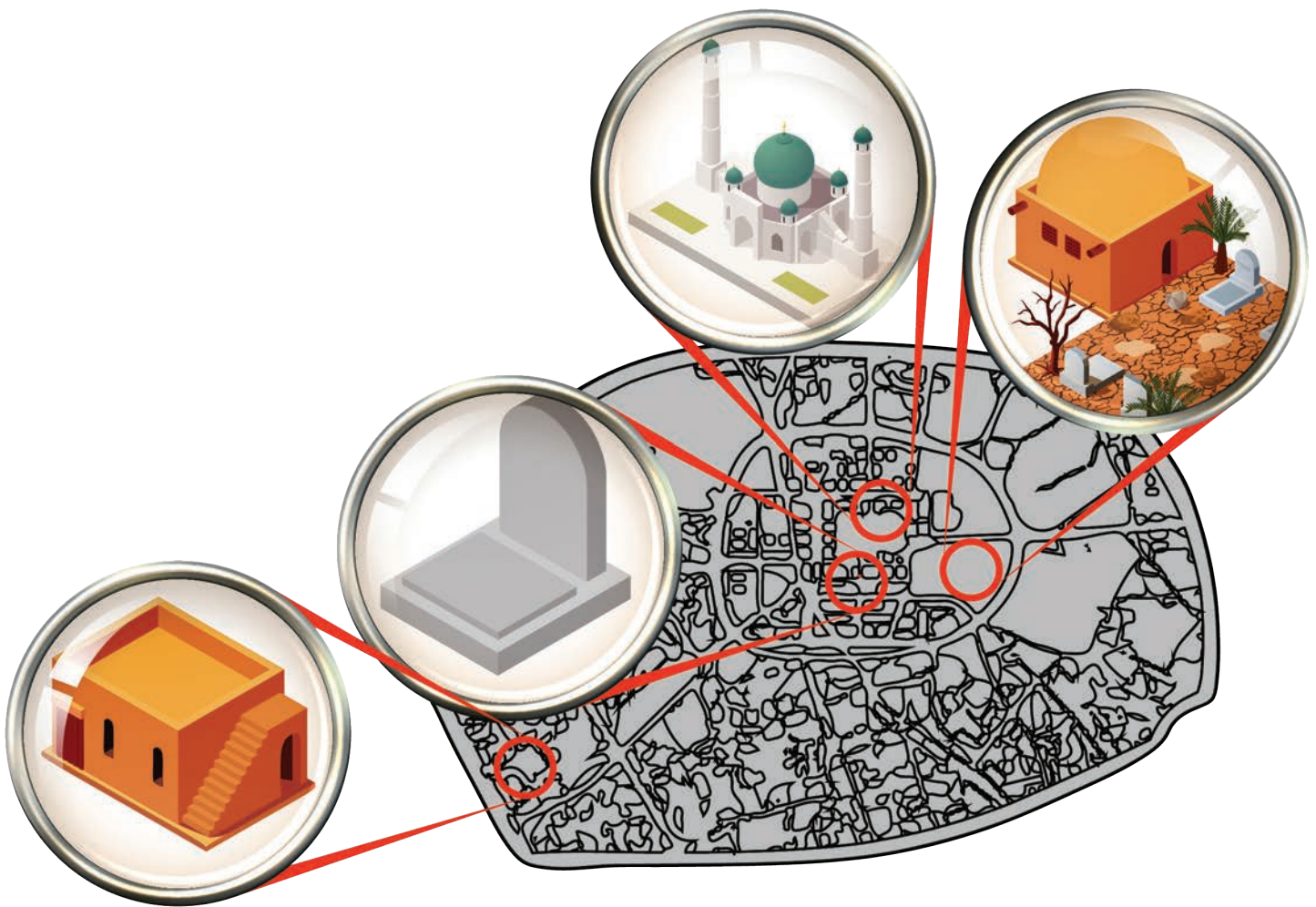
10 Ḥurr 'Āmilī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasā'il ash-Shī'ah*, Vol. 14, P. 431.

Activity 2.5a: Locate it!

In this reimagined map of Medina (which is not to scale) we can imagine the routes that our first few Imāms ﷺ might have taken daily.

Identify:

- Masjid an-Nabawī
- The house of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ
- The grave of the Noble Prophet ﷺ
- Jannatul Baqī which may contain the grave of Sayyidah Fāṭimah ﷺ
- Baytul Aḥzān (outside the limits of Medina)



Activity 2.5b: Analyze it!

Imām Ḥusayn ؑ repeatedly said that he was only uprising to restore the community (*ummah*) of his grandfather, the Messenger of Allah (*Rasūlullāh*) ؑ.

*I have risen to establish reformation and correction (iṣlāḥ) in the community of my grandfather.*¹¹

1. Define reform. What does true reform mean?

2. How did the stance of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ to not give allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Yazīd lead to the reform of the Muslim community?

3. What are some of the effects of this reform that we see today?

11 *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 44, P. 327.