

Hasan and Husain

TWO DISTINCT EXAMPLES
IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

الحَسَنُ وَالْحُسَيْنُ

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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HASAN AND HUSAIN: TWO DISTINCT EXAMPLES IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

Hasan and Husain are two symbolic figures in Islamic history, each representing a different approach. Husain represents a political approach, while Hasan represents a non-political one. Imam Husain tried to achieve his goal by confronting the ruler of his time, whereas Imam Hasan achieved the same goal by withdrawing from confrontation. Although Imam Husain's role became so well-known that everyone is familiar with it, Imam Hasan's role—even with all its greatness—remains far less recognized. And even fewer people truly understand the importance of this great role.

The influence of Imam Husain ibn Ali (4–61 AH) on later Islamic history is so strong that he became, in effect, its most dominant symbol. Every year, Muslims commemorate the 10th of Muharram with extraordinary enthusiasm, unlike any other day—even more than the 12th of Rabi‘ al-Awwal, perhaps. According to common belief, the essence of Islam is that a person should never bow to injustice, even if it costs one's life. This spirit is what people call “martyrdom,” and people believe that in its highest form, it was embodied in the life of Imam Husain. According to the generally accepted historical account, Imam Husain was accompanied by only seventy-two companions. On the other side stood an army of six thousand men, fully equipped for battle. Yet Imam Husain refused to submit to a ruler who had unjustly assumed power, and he laid down his life resisting him. As a Persian poet aptly expressed it:

Sar dād, magar na dād dast dar dast-e Yazid

“He chose death rather than submit to Yazid.”

Strangely, however, one of the most widely accepted narratives in Islamic history is consistent neither with Islamic teachings nor with the historical record. Both Islam and history reject this popular version.

What Do the Events Tell Us?

Let us now consider the actual historical background. In Makkah, the Quraysh tribe (descendants of ‘Abd Manaf) had two main branches—Banu Hashim and Banu Umayyah. A long-standing family rivalry had existed between them since the pre-Islamic period. When the Prophet was born into the Hashimite branch, only one man from within—Abu Lahab (‘Abd al-‘Uzza)—became his enemy. But the Umayyad family, as a whole, turned against him. Their opposition, however, did not succeed. After the conquest of Makkah (8 AH), the Umayyads, like other Arab tribes, entered Islam. During the Prophet’s lifetime and later under the Rashidun Caliphs, capable members of the Umayyad clan were given important positions in the Islamic state. The third caliph, ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, who belonged to the Umayyad family, ruled between 24–35 AH. Under his rule, the Umayyads gained considerable influence. After him, when ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib was chosen as caliph—the first from the Hashimite family—the Umayyads’ old rivalry came alive again. The issue of avenging Uthman’s assassination strengthened their position, and they refused to pledge allegiance to the fourth

Caliph. Ali's entire caliphate (35–40 AH) was marked by civil wars, until he was assassinated by a fanatical Muslim.

After 'Ali, allegiance was given to his son Hasan ibn 'Ali. At that time, only Iraq and Khurasan (Iran) recognized Hasan's rule, while other regions—Yemen, Hijaz, Syria, Palestine, Egypt—were under Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan of the Umayyads. He had not accepted 'Ali's authority before, and now he refused Hasan's as well. By Rabi' al-Awwal 41 AH, the situation had reached a critical point: on one side, Imam Hasan had more than forty thousand armed supporters ready to fight to the death; on the other, Mu'awiyah had sixty thousand soldiers prepared for battle. Imam Hasan reflected that during his father's five-year rule, Muslims had been killing one another with their own swords. If he insisted on holding onto the caliphate, this bloodshed would only continue indefinitely. Although Hasan was the rightful caliph and the legitimate ruler of the Muslim territories, he realized that the opposing side was unwilling to withdraw. He therefore withdrew from the conflict himself and handed the caliphate over to Mu'awiyah.

For the next twenty years (41–60 AH), peace followed. Instead of fighting each other, Muslim forces turned their attention to expanding Islam's frontiers. After Mu'awiyah's death (Rajab 60 AH), the question of succession resurfaced. Imam Husayn, who had not agreed with his elder brother's decision to step down, now refused to accept the rule of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah (25–64 AH)—just as Mu'awiyah had earlier refused to accept the caliphate of Husayn's father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. At this point, Imam Husayn ibn Ali (4–61 AH) enters

the historical narrative—the events associated with him being commemorated every year on the 10th of Muharram.

History records that after Yazid took the throne in Damascus, he wrote to his governor in Madinah, Walid ibn ‘Utbah ibn Abi Sufyan, instructing him to take allegiance from the people in Yazid’s name. When Walid gathered the people, Imam Husayn declined to pledge. The next day, he quietly left Madinah with his family and went to Makkah. But even Makkah could not provide him peace. The people there had pledged allegiance to ‘Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr. This situation weighed so heavily on Imam Husayn that he and the members of his family would not offer prayers behind Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, who was, at that time, practically the ruler of Makkah.

Earlier, the issue of avenging ‘Uthman’s death had already made both Makkah and Madinah hostile environments for ‘Ali. He had therefore left Madinah and settled in Kufa (Iraq). Thus, in 36 AH, the Islamic capital shifted from Madinah to Kufa. After Hasan stepped down in 41 AH, he too left Kufa and returned to Madinah. Regarding the temperament of the Kufans, the Arab poet Farazdaq told Imam Husayn with striking accuracy: “The hearts of the people of Kufa are with you, but their swords will never be drawn for your support.” When Yazid became caliph, the Kufans’ attachment to the Prophet’s family grew stronger, and their devotion intensified. They began writing to Imam Husayn, inviting him to come to Kufa. They began sending letters to Imam Husayn, urging him to come to Kufa, assuring him that they would pledge

allegiance to him. Nearly one hundred and fifty such letters reached him in Makkah.

Imam Hasan clearly understood the delicacy of the situation. During his last days, he advised his younger brother Husain: "Never be deceived by the promises of the people of Kufa. I have realized that Prophethood and Caliphate cannot both remain within our family. For this reason, it would be better for you to stay silent in this matter." However, being courageous and resolute by nature, Imam Husain could not agree to such advice. He decided to go to Kufa. He called his cousin, Muslim ibn Aqeel ibn Abi Talib, and said: "You should go to Kufa first and take people's pledge of allegiance on my behalf. Soon I will come myself."

Muslim ibn Aqeel was not in favor of this plan, but at Imam Husain's insistence, he set out for Kufa. When he arrived there as Husain's representative, many people welcomed him. It is said that nearly 18,000 people pledged allegiance to Imam Husain through Muslim ibn Aqeel, who was acting as his representative. When Yazid heard of this, he appointed Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad to suppress the people of Kufa. Ubaydullah came from Basra to Kufa, gathered the people, and warned them harshly. He then had Muslim ibn Aqeel and his Kufan host, Hani ibn Urwah, taken to the roof of his palace and executed. Their severed heads and bloodstained bodies were cast down from the roof before the assembled people. This was a grim warning that anyone intending to support Imam Husain should first consider the fate that awaited them. Terrified by this spectacle, the people fell silent and returned to their homes.

Meanwhile, in Makkah, Imam Husain was unaware of all that had happened and was preparing to leave for Kufa. Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Amr ibn Saad ibn al-Aas, Abd al-Rahman ibn Harith, and other prominent figures of Makkah strongly urged him not to proceed. Abdullah ibn Zubair said: "Instead of going to Kufa, accept leadership here in Makkah. If you extend your hand, I will be the first to pledge allegiance to you." But Husain refused. Abdullah ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Talib wrote from Madinah, urging him not to go, but he did not listen. He even rejected Abdullah ibn Abbas's final advice: that he should at least leave the women and children behind in Makkah, or delay his journey until after Hajj, which was only a few days away.

When Imam Husain set out for Kufa in the first week of Dhu al-Hijjah, 60 AH, he met Abdullah ibn Muti on the way. Abdullah said to him, "I implore you by God to return to Makkah. If you attempt to wrest the caliphate from the Umayyads, they will certainly kill you. After that, they will become emboldened to kill every Hashimite, every Arab, and every Muslim." However, nothing could deter Imam Husain's courageous and resolute nature. Yazid ibn Muawiya and his governor of Iraq, Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, were receiving constant reports. They stationed six thousand soldiers at different locations to prevent Husain from entering Kufa. At first, a few hundred men accompanied him, but as soon as they learned of Yazid's forces, they began to leave. By the time Husain's caravan reached Karbala, only seventy-two remained, mostly his own family and clan.

At last, Imam Husain realized the reality of the situation. The killing of Muslim ibn Aqeel, the betrayal of the Kufans, and Yazid's massive army against his small caravan—all of this left no chance of success. He knew that confrontation could only mean death. Husain was a noble and courageous man; neither war nor death frightened him. But he could not stop the feelings of compassion he felt for his companions, women, and children. History tells us that in the end, he was ready to seek a peaceful settlement with Yazid. He presented three proposals to Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, Yazid's governor:

1. I will return to Makkah and spend my life there quietly in worship.
2. Allow me to go to the frontier, where I will fight the unbelievers until I am martyred.
3. "I may place my hand in Yazid's hand and pledge allegiance to him." (*Imma an ada'a yadi fi yadi Yazid*; Tarikh al-Tabari, Vol. 5, p. 413)

The men in Yazid's army were greatly pleased by this change in Imam Husain's position. Although the two sides stood opposed to each other on the field of Karbala, their respect for the Prophet's grandson was such that people from both sides performed their prayers together, with Imam Husain often leading them in prayer. When Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad received Husain's proposals, he too was pleased, thinking the matter would end without bloodshed and that Husain would pledge allegiance to Yazid. But one of his advisors, Shimr ibn Dhi'l-Jawshan, a man of harsh and cruel character, persuaded him otherwise. He argued that such an opportunity to end Husain's cause forever would never come again. Acting on

this advice, Ibn Ziyad ordered all escape routes blocked. Whichever direction Husain tried to turn, an army stood in his way.

On the 10th of Muharram, 61 AH, Yazid's forces began their attack. Husain's companions fought bravely, but all were killed. In the end, only Husain remained, apart from the women and children. The soldiers hesitated to strike him, turning aside when it was their turn. Finally, Shimr ibn Dhi'l-Jawshan—the same man who had incited the governor—advanced with a group of men and attacked the brave Imam, ending his life. To add to the tragedy, Shimr was Husain's maternal uncle, and Amr ibn Sa'd—the man who had fired the first arrow at Husain's caravan—was also his uncle.

The account of Imam Husain's martyrdom found in al-Tabari and other early histories is very different from the emotional versions recited by poets and preachers. The fact is that Imam Husain's political action was, to a large extent, prompted by his bold nature. The Companions of the Prophet who were alive at the time opposed his decision. The elders of Makkah and Madinah warned him, and even his own relatives disagreed with him. Yet his determined spirit could not be restrained. However, in the final days, he came to realize the seriousness of the matter, reaching the same conclusion that his elder brother, Imam Hasan, had reached with foresight twenty years earlier. Yazid ibn Muawiya was in Damascus, his capital. If he had personally been in Karbala with his army, and if there had been direct conversation between him and Husain, there is little doubt that he would have accepted Husain's final proposal. Yazid was an enemy of Husain as a

political rival—but once Husain had pledged allegiance, he would have become for Yazid the “grandson of the Prophet.” Yazid would have honored him and sent him safely back to his homeland. But Yazid only learned of Husain’s conciliatory offer after Husain’s head had already been severed from his body.

The Issue of a Political Rival

On the final day of the confrontation, 10 Muharram 61 AH, Imam Husain delivered a speech before Yazid’s army on the field of Karbala. It was a masterpiece of eloquence. Among other things, he said, “Had even the donkey of Jesus survived, the Christians would have cared for it until the Day of Judgement. What kind of Muslims and followers of the Prophet are you that you seek to kill your Prophet’s grandson?”

In reality, had it been a question of the Prophet’s donkey, Muslims too would have venerated it. They were fully prepared to honour the Prophet’s grandson. The problem, however, was that Imam Husain had appeared before them as a political rival. And no one spares a political rival, whether Christian or Muslim.

The same Yazid who, in 61 AH, appointed the ruthless Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad to deal with Imam Husain’s opposition with an iron hand, sent Muslim ibn Uqbah to march on Madinah in 62 AH. Yet he gave him strict instructions to take special care of Imam Husain’s son, Ali ibn Husain ibn Ali (38–95 AH), and to ensure that no harm came to him. This was

because, after the tragedy of Karbala, Ali ibn Husain—Imam Zayn al-Abidin—had withdrawn from politics and settled on the outskirts of Madinah.

When the people of Madinah wished to pledge allegiance to him, he categorically refused to accept their pledge. He said, “Both my father and my grandfather lost their lives over the question of the caliphate. Should I too involve myself in it and have myself killed?”

After the Battle of Karbala, Yazid treated the surviving members of Imam Husain’s family with great honour and respect. He provided them with every possible assistance and sent them back to Madinah.

Yazid used force to obtain the allegiance of Husain ibn Ali, Abdullah ibn Zubayr, and others. However, he did not interfere with Abdullah ibn Umar. He wrote to his governor in Madinah, Walid ibn Utbah ibn Abi Sufyan, instructing him that if Abdullah ibn Umar declined to pledge allegiance, he should be left alone. Yazid knew that Abdullah ibn Umar was a devout and ascetic man with no political ambition.

Yazid’s father, Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, had once summed up his political principle in a single sentence: “I do not stand between people and their words, unless they stand between us and our rule.” (*Tarikh al-Tabari*, Vol. 5, p. 336) Yazid inherited this principle of politics—if not completely, then to a large extent. The reaction to the tragedy of Karbala in Madinah was that people rose in rebellion against Yazid’s rule. At that time, nearly a thousand members of Yazid’s tribe (the Banu Umayyah) were living in Madinah. They began to be harassed and attacked. The Umayyads sent a messenger to

inform Yazid of the situation. When the messenger reached Damascus and explained what was happening, Yazid recited this verse:

“They have changed the patience that was in my nature;
So I have changed my way with my people—gentleness
replaced by harshness.” (*Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* by Ibn al-
Athir, Vol. 3, p. 311)

From this it becomes clear that if Imam Husayn had not become Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah’s political rival, Yazid’s treatment of him would have been entirely different.

The Role of Imam Hasan

The situation Imam Husayn faced against Yazid had already appeared—more severely—in the life of his elder brother, Imam Hasan, against Mu‘awiyah. But Imam Hasan responded in a completely different way. His approach was markedly different from that of Imam Husayn. It is worth noting that in Hadith collections, under the section of virtues, many reports are recorded about both Hasan and Husayn. Still, there is a difference between the two brothers. Regarding Imam Husayn, the authentic narrations mainly describe the Prophet’s love for him, which was natural since Husayn was his grandson. For example, Usamah ibn Zayd reports that he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) say:

“These two (Hasan and Husayn) are my sons and the sons of my daughter. O God, I love them, so You love them too.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 4103)

In contrast, the narrations about Imam Hasan are not only stronger in authenticity, but they also point beyond natural affection. For example, Anas ibn Malik reports:

“No one resembled the Prophet (ﷺ) more than Hasan ibn ‘Ali.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3752)

Beyond physical resemblance, another fact stands out: in reliable narrations, we do not find any mention of a predicted historical role for Imam Husayn. But regarding Imam Hasan, it is established that the Prophet (ﷺ) foretold a great role for him:

Abu Bakrah says: “I saw the Messenger of God on the pulpit, with Hasan ibn ‘Ali beside him. The Prophet looked once at the people and once at Hasan, and said: “This son of mine is a leader. Perhaps God will use him to bring peace between two great groups of Muslims.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2704)

This prophecy came true word for word in Imam Hasan’s life. His caliphate began in the year 40 AH, when conflict among Muslims was still ongoing. Some people had rallied under the banner of Banu Umayyah, while others were with Banu Hashim. Neither side could defeat the other, and neither was willing to yield. When Imam Hasan accepted allegiance, he also made people promise: “Whoever I fight, you will fight; whoever I make peace with, you will make peace with.” After the martyrdom of ‘Ali, pledging allegiance to his son meant a direct challenge to Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, the leader of the Umayyads. From his capital in Damascus, Mu‘awiyah marched with an army of sixty thousand towards Kufah,

where Hasan ibn 'Ali was based. Imam Hasan also set out from Kufah with almost the same number of soldiers. One witness described them as "battalions like mountains." These were men who had pledged to fight to the death under 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and were unwilling to settle for anything less.

Both armies encamped near Madain. Mu'awiyah then sent Imam Hasan a message, saying that peace was better than war, and proposing that Hasan recognize him as caliph and give him allegiance. After careful thought, Imam Hasan accepted the offer. He remained caliph for six months, and in 41 AH pledged allegiance to Mu'awiyah, handing over the caliphate. For Imam Hasan's zealous supporters, this "humiliation" was unbearable. They loudly protested against his decision, calling him 'aar al-muslimeen (the disgrace of the Muslims) and mudhill al-mu'mineen (the one who humiliated the believers). Some even called him a disbeliever. They tore his clothes and attacked him with a sword. Yet Imam Hasan refused to adopt a confrontational path. He said:

"If the caliphate was Mu'awiyah's right, then it has reached him. If it was my right, then I have given it to him."

(*Mustadrak al-Hakim*, Athar No. 4873)

After the peace agreement, Mu'awiyah fixed an annual allowance of one hundred thousand dirhams for Imam Hasan. (*Hafiz al-Dhahabi, al-'Ibar*, vol. 1, p. 48)

The result of this single step back was that Muslim infighting turned into unity. The year 41 AH, which could have been remembered as the third great bloodshed in Islamic history after Siffin and Jamal, came instead to be known as 'Aam al-

Jama'ah—the Year of Unity. Instead of division, it became the year of solidarity. The strength of the Muslims, which had been wasted in internal battles, was now directed toward spreading and expanding Islam. To step back is the greatest form of courage—though very few are willing to prepare themselves for such courage.

For twenty years after the Prophet's passing (11 AH), Muslim conquests continued. Each month brought news of a new region being won. But in the final years of the third caliph, civil wars began that brought conquests to a halt for almost ten years. It is a historical fact that the person who reopened this closed door was Imam Hasan. On the surface, giving up the caliphate in 41 AH looked like a withdrawal from the field of action. In reality, it was a better way of returning to action. It redirected Muslim strength from internal conflict to external field of action. This retreat opened new opportunities for success in Islamic history. Had Imam Hasan insisted on retaining the caliphate, it is quite possible that Islamic history would have come to an end in the very first century AH. The Muslims would have continued to destroy one another through internal conflict, while the opponents of Islam would have regained their strength and ultimately wiped out Islam altogether.

The Prophet's Instructions

Imam Hasan's position was neither accidental nor merely a matter of personal temperament. It was based on the clear teachings of the Shariah. God had informed the Prophet Muhammad that, after him, disorder would arise in the

political affairs of the Muslims. The Prophet therefore instructed Muslims in the clearest terms not to begin fighting among themselves in the name of “reform.” Instead, they were to remain focused on carrying out their duties and obligations. Many traditions conveying this guidance are recorded in hadith collections under Kitab al-Fitan, the Book of Trials and Tribulations.

Hazrat Hudhayfah says: People used to ask the Messenger of God ﷺ about “good,” but I would ask him about “evil,” fearing that I might fall into it. I asked, “We were once in ignorance and evil, then God gave us good. After this good, will there be evil again?” He ﷺ replied:

“There will be leaders after me who will not follow my guidance and will not live by my Sunnah. Among them will arise men whose hearts are like the hearts of devils in human bodies.” Hudhayfah said: “I asked, O Messenger of God, if I live in that time, what should I do?” He ﷺ replied: “Listen to and obey the ruler, even if your back is struck and your wealth is taken. Listen and obey.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1847)

In another version, the Prophet added: “Or die in that condition, clinging to the trunk of a tree.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23429)

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Woe to the Arabs because of an evil that has drawn near. The one who restrains his hand will succeed.” (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 4249)

Abu Musa reported that the Prophet ﷺ warned of an approaching period of turmoil. The people asked, "What do you command us to do?" The Prophet ﷺ replied: "Break your bows, cut your bowstrings, strike your swords against stones, and remain in your homes. If someone enters your house intending to kill you, then be like the better of Adam's two sons." (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith No. 4259) In other words, allow yourself to be killed rather than kill another person.

This was the very instruction that the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, followed. He was chosen as Caliph in Muharram 24 AH and in Dhu al-Hijjah 35 AH he was martyred by Muslim rebels at the age of eighty-two. At that time, a group of loyal Muslims in Madinah were ready to fight and die to protect him. But Caliph Uthman made them swear not to attack their Muslim brothers. He remained inside his house, reciting the Quran, until the attackers killed him with swords and spears.

The Third Caliph's refusal to resist violently was neither accidental nor merely a matter of temperament. It was a deliberate act of obedience to the command of the Shariah. According to the Shariah, a believer is never permitted to initiate aggression. A Muslim follows the path of invitation and counsel, not that of armed conflict.

If others initiate aggression, two different situations arise. If the aggressors are unbelievers, Muslims are permitted to defend themselves under specific conditions (Quran 2:190). However, if the aggression is initiated by a Muslim, one is commanded not to strike one's fellow Muslim, even in self-

defence. The Quran expresses this principle through the words of one of Adam's sons, who represents the response of a true believer: "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you." (Quran 5:28)

The third Caliph acted according to this command. He did not resist his Muslim attackers and was martyred without resistance. He became the better of the two sons of Adam. But the strange thing is that although this Caliph set such a profound example of Sharia in practice, after him Muslims fought one another for five years (35–40 AH) in the name of avenging Uthman's blood. In that struggle, one hundred thousand Muslims were slain by the swords of other Muslims. Despite this bloodshed, the matter of Uthman's killers was left for God to decide.

The battle far greater than any individual fight is the one waged against an established Muslim government. Such a confrontation leads only to ruin in this world and the next. The Prophet ﷺ foresaw that the urge to reform politics would drive people to rise up against their rulers. He therefore warned people in advance never to start such movements. Instead of clashing with rulers, he instructed them to give sincere advice. If that failed, they should remain silent and be content to pray to God for their rulers' well-being. The reason for this emphasis was that rising against an established government in the name of what is right would only lead to further disorder with no positive result.

Jarir ibn Abdullah reported: On the day of the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Messenger of God ﷺ said to me, "Tell the people to be silent." Then he said, "Do not turn into

disbelievers after me, striking one another's necks." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 121; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 65)

As a result of these instructions, during the Battle of Siffin (36 AH), tens of thousands of the Prophet's Companions were present. Yet among them, the number who actually participated in that internal conflict was barely thirty. (Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj as-Sunnah*, vol. 6, p. 236)

The books of Hadith contain numerous reports in their chapters on civil strife that make this principle unmistakably clear. On the basis of these explicit teachings, Muslim jurists later formulated the ruling that rebellion against a ruler who has established control even by force is not permissible, because it leads to division within the Muslim community, bloodshed, and loss of life. Here are a few more narrations by way of example:

‘Awf ibn Malik reported: I heard the Messenger of God ﷺ say, "The best of your rulers are those you love and who love you; you pray for them and they pray for you. The worst of your rulers are those you hate and who hate you; you curse them and they curse you." We said, "O Messenger of God, should we not fight them?" He replied, "No, not as long as they establish the prayer among you." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1855)

Wa'il ibn Hujr reported that Salamah ibn Yazid asked the Prophet ﷺ, "O Messenger of God, what do you command us to do if our rulers demand their rights from us but withhold our rights?" The Prophet ﷺ turned away from him. When Salamah repeated the question, the Prophet ﷺ replied, "Listen and obey. They will be accountable for what they

do, and you will be accountable for what you do.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1846)

Ibn ‘Abbās reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever finds something in his ruler that he dislikes should remain patient, for whoever withdraws from obedience to him even by a handspan dies a death of the Age of Ignorance.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 7053; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1849)

Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud narrated: The Prophet ﷺ said, “After me, there will be selfishness, injustice, and many things that you will find objectionable.” The people asked, “O Messenger of God, what do you command us to do in such circumstances?” He ﷺ replied, “Fulfil the obligations placed upon you, and ask God to grant you what is rightfully yours.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3603; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1943)

Abu Sa‘id reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “A time will soon come when a Muslim’s best possession will be sheep, which he will take to the mountain tops and places where rainfall is plentiful, fleeing with his faith from turmoil (political turmoil).” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 19)

The Prophet’s words, “As long as your rulers allow you to pray, do not fight them,” in reality mean: never fight them at all. This is because no Muslim ruler would ever destroy mosques or prevent people from bowing and prostrating, while still claiming to be a Muslim ruler. All those whom we have labeled “oppressors” became so only when their authority was challenged. And this type of “oppression” is something found in every authority—whether political or non-political.

The second point is that this guidance does not mean the community should become a voiceless flock under unjust rulers. Rather, it shows a higher and deeper way forward. It seeks to nurture a positive mindset instead of a negative one, turning people's efforts away from destruction and toward constructive action. It points to the profound truth that in life, indirect efforts often achieve far more than direct confrontation. These actions may seem quiet and lacking in outward pomp and show, but in the end, they prove so effective that they deprive opponents of the very ground they stand on. Sincere prayer to God, spreading love and goodwill, and fulfilling one's own responsibilities are powerful means of change. One should avoid movements against others, refrain from political conflict, and instead awaken human conscience through calm advice. Even if one suffers personal injustice, one should continue to give others their due rights and strengthen one's roots among the people. Whoever follows this constructive path with sincerity and perseverance will surely move towards success.

The Futility of Political Conflict

The experience of the first Islamic century proved once and for all that launching opposition against an established political system—even with good intentions—only increases disorder. It creates new problems and makes matters even more complicated. The attempt to reform Uthman's government revived the old tribal rivalry between two branches of the Quraysh, the Umayyads and the Hashimites, in an even sharper form. It also created favourable conditions for

Abdullah ibn Saba, a Jewish convert to Islam, to introduce the doctrine of the “designated successor” and turn the political question of succession to the Caliphate into an issue of religious belief. As a result, Muslims became permanently divided into two hostile groups: Shia and Sunni. Long-suppressed tribal rivalries rose up again under the cover of “ideological” slogans. Arabs, who looked down on non-Arabs, rallied under Muawiya. Non-Arabs, resentful of Arab dominance, joined Ali ibn Abi Talib’s army. The reform movement ended only in political corruption. It spread chaos across the Muslim world and led to the killing of the third Caliph, Uthman. But his murder did not end the matter—it started an endless cycle of action and reaction. Except for a temporary pause during Muawiya’s rule (41–60 AH), the conflict dragged on for centuries. Millions of lives were lost in the most brutal ways. And the original issue—whether to reform the caliphate or to avenge Uthman’s murder—remained unresolved, waiting for the final judgment where all matters will ultimately be settled.

It should also be noted that a war fought for power never ends with simple victory or defeat. When Group A fights Group B, the victorious side itself eventually splits into new factions. The struggle between the Umayyads and the Hashimites over the caliphate began in 35 AH and continued in various forms for almost a hundred years. Throughout this period, the Umayyads kept power. In 133 AH, the Hashimites (the Abbasids), with Persian support, finally overthrew them. But soon after, the Hashimites themselves split into Abbasids and Alawites and began fighting one another. Muhammad

ibn Abdullah ibn Hasan ibn Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib ibn Abdul Muttalib—known as al-Nafs al-Zakiyyah (d. 145 AH)—became a political rival of the Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib. With his followers, he launched a “Movement for a Just Order” against Mansur (who ruled 136–158 AH). Mansur, however, prevailed and crushed the Alawites. Both belonged to the Hashimite clan—one descended from Abu Talib ibn Abdul Muttalib, the other from Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib. While opposing the Umayyads, they had stood united. But once power changed hands, they became rivals, and the rivalry did not end until one destroyed the other.

After Uthman's assassination, Aisha, the Mother of the Believers, was the first to demand punishment of his killers. Zubair ibn al-Awwam, Talha ibn Ubaydullah, and many others joined her. This eventually divided the Muslims into two armed groups. Thirty thousand men gathered under Aisha's banner, and twenty thousand under Ali ibn Abi Talib. They clashed near Basra in what became known as the Battle of the Camel (36 AH). In this battle, ten thousand Muslims were killed by fellow Muslims. Talha died from wounds, while Zubair was killed in prayer at Wadi al-Siba' after leaving the battlefield.

Then came the second stage. Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, then governor of Syria, took up the cause. Ali ibn Abi Talib demanded allegiance, while Muawiya demanded justice for Uthman's murder. Once again, at Siffin in Syria (37 AH), a fierce battle was fought. Around seventy thousand Muslims

were killed by Muslims. Even after such heavy bloodshed, the dispute was not resolved, leading to arbitration at Dumat al-Jandal. But the main issue remained unsolved. Worse, the role of Amr ibn al-As in the arbitration not only caused more deaths but also destroyed trust in Muslim society. This atmosphere of mistrust gave birth to the Kharijite sect, which later confronted Ali at Nahrawan (37 AH), where about ten thousand Muslims were killed. Their suspicion grew so extreme that they declared Muawiya, Amr ibn al-As, and Ali ibn Abi Talib all equally deserving of death.

After five years (35–40 AH) of civil war and terrible losses in the name of Uthman's blood, the actual outcome was that Muawiya's power became stronger. Most Muslim lands—Yemen, Hijaz, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt—came under his control. Ali's rule was limited to Iraq and Persia. After Ali's assassination (40 AH), Hasan's abdication of the caliphate further strengthened Muawiya, who then ruled the entire Muslim world without challenge for twenty years (41–60 AH).

But after Muawiya's death, the conflict reappeared. He had appointed his son Yazid as heir and had already secured allegiance for him. People felt, however, that Muawiya had made a mistake by settling the matter of succession without consultation. When Yazid became caliph, some said he was unfit for the role. At that time, respected figures like Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Zubair, Husayn ibn Ali, and Abdur Rahman ibn Abi Bakr were alive. As a result, some refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid. Two

men especially led this opposition: Abdullah ibn Zubair and Husayn ibn Ali.

Still, most of the Companions either stayed silent or advised accepting Yazid's rule to avoid further bloodshed. Abdullah ibn Abbas was in Makkah when news of Muawiya's death arrived. People gathered to hear his reaction. He said: "Muawiya's son Yazid is among the worthy men of his family. So stay in your places and give him your obedience and pledge of allegiance." (Ansab al-Ashraf by al-Baladhuri, Vol. 5, p. 302)

Likewise, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah spoke in Yazid's favor and discouraged rebellion against him. Hamid ibn Abdur Rahman recalls visiting Bashir, one of the Companions, when Yazid was appointed heir. Bashir said:

"People say Yazid is not the best man in the community of Muhammad (ﷺ). I also say the same. But I prefer the unity of Muhammad's community over its division." (Al-Dhahabi, Tarikh al-Islam, vol. 4, p. 169)

This viewpoint was in fact based on the clear instruction of the Prophet (ﷺ): do not engage in political disputes with rulers; instead, find another, non-political, way to express the spirit of reform. But compared to politics, a constructive approach has always attracted fewer people. Most chose the path of political confrontation, and as a result, men of exceptional capability such as Imam Husayn and Abdullah ibn Zubair—along with countless other Muslims—were killed by the swords of their own brothers. When Yazid learned that the people of Makkah and Madinah had risen in rebellion, he even ordered attacks on the two sacred cities. The walls of

the Kaaba were torn down. Yet despite all these sacrifices, the real problem remained unresolved. Yazid's rule could not be ended by anyone except the Angel of Death.

One of the losses of these civil wars in the first Islamic century was that many great Companions—who had carried Islam forward like a flood, overcoming mighty powers such as Rustam and Isfandiyar—were cut off from public life. Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, the conqueror of Iran, withdrew from the cities and spent his time tending camels and goats. Abdullah ibn Umar, who by his qualities could have become a "second Umar," grew disheartened by internal disputes and withdrew into seclusion. And so, it went with others as well. Yet their withdrawal from the battlefield was not entirely negative. There was, however, a positive side to this development. They now devoted themselves to teaching and religious guidance. Narrating the Hadith, helping others understand the essence of Islamic teachings, and acquainting them with the life of the Prophet ﷺ became their principal activities. It was during this period that material relating to Hadith, the Prophet's biography, and Islamic history was collected. Those who had once distinguished themselves on the battlefield now found another way to serve Islam through teaching and scholarship.

Yazid's Appointment as Crown Prince

The decision of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan to appoint his son, Yazid, as crown prince has always been a deeply controversial issue. There is no doubt that this step only added to the tragedies of Islamic history. Still, many careful observers believe Mu'awiya acted with sincere intentions. He genuinely

thought that Yazid was the most capable person in the Muslim world to hold the caliphate. According to Ibn Khaldun, “The reason Mu‘awiya was moved to appoint his son Yazid, instead of another, was to preserve the unity of the community.” When Abdullah ibn Umar objected to the appointment, Mu‘awiya replied: “I feared that after me the people would scatter like sheep without a shepherd.” (al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Ibn Kathir, vol. 11, p. 308)

Several such reports suggest that Mu‘awiya was sincere in his choice. It is even related that, while standing on the pulpit during the Friday sermon, he prayed:

“O God, if I have appointed Yazid because of the virtues I saw in him, then grant him the position I hoped for and support him. But if I did so only out of a father’s love for his son, then take his soul before he reaches that position.”

(Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, Vol. 4, p. 169)

Yet the question remains: how could Mu‘awiya be satisfied to nominate for the caliphate a man who had the support of only one senior Companion of the Prophet (Mughira ibn Shu‘ba), while thousands of other Companions then alive were either opposed to the appointment or remained silent only to avoid division in the community? Moreover, Mu‘awiya himself was known as an extremely far-sighted statesman. Umar ibn al-Khattab once described him as “a man who could smile even when angry.” (*Al-Istiab* by Ibn Abd al-Barr, Vol. 3, p. 450) He possessed a remarkable ability to make decisions with a cool and level mind. How, then, could such a statesman

place confidence in a decision which later history proved to be mistaken?

Another point deserves consideration. In 41 AH, Hasan ibn Ali brought a major political conflict to an end by relinquishing the Caliphate in favour of Mu'awiyah. Although Imam Hasan had not made this a condition, Mu'awiyah, of his own accord, gave a verbal assurance in the presence of Abdullah ibn Amir that Imam Hasan would succeed him as Caliph. Ibn Kathir writes:

“When Mu'awiya made peace with Hasan, he agreed that Hasan would succeed him. But when Hasan passed away, Mu'awiya's inclination toward Yazid grew stronger, and he came to believe Yazid was deserving of the caliphate.”

(Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 11, p. 308)

After Hasan ibn Ali had made such an extraordinary sacrifice by giving up the caliphate in favor of Mu'awiya, the least Mu'awiya could have done in return was to honor his promise by nominating Hasan's capable brother, Husayn ibn Ali. But this thought never took hold in his mind. Instead, he pressed ahead with full determination, nominating his son Yazid and securing the people's pledge of allegiance for him.

As for Yazid's incapacities, it is enough to point to one fact: Husayn ibn Ali was killed during his reign. This was not only an act of cruelty, but also, from a political perspective, an utterly reckless decision. As head of a great empire, Yazid should have known that killing the Prophet's grandson would inevitably provoke outrage. And that is exactly what happened. To deal with the fallout, he was forced to attack

Makkah and Madinah, during which nearly two thousand Muslims were killed in the two holy cities.

Another point Yazid completely failed to grasp was that reconciliation with a noble man is always possible until the very last moment. History shows that although Husayn ignored the advice of elders and friends when he left Makkah, determined not to accept anything less than holding Yazid to account, once he reached Karbala and realized that the promises from the people of Kufa—on which he had relied so much that he even brought his family—were nothing but lies, he resolved to withdraw from politics and lead a life away from public affairs. In other words, at its final stage, the conflict between Yazid and Husayn had reached the same point as the earlier conflict between Mu'awiya and Hasan. But Mu'awiya, being a seasoned statesman, had simply signed a blank page and sent it to Hasan, telling him to write whatever peace terms he wished. By contrast, when Husayn offered a similar proposal, Yazid's men killed him. Although Yazid was not present on the battlefield, when he saw Husayn's severed head he reacted with shock and grief. Yet he cannot be absolved of responsibility, because the atmosphere a ruler creates is precisely what his subordinates act upon.

The story of Yazid's nomination shows how even with sincerity and good intentions, a person can make a colossal mistake. Human beings are often overwhelmed by their own likes and dislikes. Their immediate circumstances shape their mindset, and they begin to think only within those limits. Their thinking becomes conditioned. They may act with good intentions, yet still make wrong decisions. That

is why Islam places such great emphasis on consultation. Through consultation, one person's mistake is corrected by another's perspective. In collective affairs, consultation is as necessary as congregation is for the Friday prayer. Mu'awiya was undoubtedly sincere. But his decision was the product of a conditioned mind—one that failed to take account of the stark realities that lay plainly outside his own outlook.

It is said that when Amir Mu'awiya fell seriously ill near the time of his death, he called Yazid and gave him some advice. He said:

“My son, I have spared you the hardship of saddling horses and making long journeys. I have turned difficulties into ease, subdued your enemies, and brought the proud Arabs under obedience. I have provided for you things that no one before me ever provided.” (*Tarikh al-Tabari*, Vol. 5, p. 322)

When a single idea takes hold of a person's mind, he often becomes blind to the realities that go against it. This is exactly what happened with Amir Mu'awiya. He overlooked two very serious truths. The first was that in Islam, the choice of caliph lies with the shura (council of consultation). For a ruler to appoint his son as caliph was against the spirit of Islam, and such an action was bound to provoke a reaction. This gave his rivals, the Banu Hashim, an ideological basis to revive their movement against Umayyad rule. And this is exactly what happened. As soon as Amir Mu'awiya passed away, uprisings against Yazid broke out across the Muslim world. Not for a single day of his rule did Yazid live in peace as caliph.

The second truth that Amir Mu'awiya forgot was that the death before which he was advising his son would soon

come to his son as well. History tells us that Yazid ruled for barely three and a half years before he died. After him, Amir Mu'awiya's grandson, Mu'awiya bin Yazid bin Mu'awiya (39–64 AH), took the throne, but he too died after only three months. Thus, within less than four years of Amir Mu'awiya's death, the caliphate passed out of the hands of his sons and grandsons, and into the family of Marwan bin Hakam bin Abi al-'As bin Umayyah (2–65 AH). If Mu'awiya had reflected on the uncertainty of human destiny, he might not have taken the step that led historians to write that Mu'awiya was the first person to introduce into Islam the tradition of Caesar and Chosroes. (*Tarikh al-Khulafa* by Al-Suyuti, p. 362)

On the other hand, for those who raise the banner to depose corrupt rulers, this event also holds a great lesson. If a person chooses patience and limits his reform efforts to what lies within his reach, he will soon realize that the Master of the universe is bringing about the same event in a far better and more successful way—something that, because of our impatience, we often try to bring about in a failed manner.

This article is based on a lecture delivered on 8 January 1978 in Burhanpur (Madhya Pradesh), at a gathering organized by the Halqa Nairang-e-Khayal.

Hasan and Husain, the Prophet's grandsons, embodied two contrasting responses to political conflict. Why did Hasan surrender power while Husain choose confrontation? This thought-provoking booklet explores the historical context behind their decisions. Drawing on early Islamic history, authentic traditions, and Islamic teachings, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan examines the consequences of political conflict and the power of reconciliation.

It invites readers to reconsider familiar narratives and discover an enduring lesson: true courage may lie not in fighting for power, but in stepping back to preserve life, unity, peace, and reform.

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