

'Ashura - Misrepresentations and Distortions, Part 2

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This is the second part of a translation of a series of four sermons delivered by the author during the month of Muharram of 1389 H. (March 1969) on the topic of the meaning and significance of 'Ashura and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a) at Karbala. The Persian appeared under the title Hamaseh-ye Husayni (Tehran: Intisharat-e Sadra, 2nd impression, 1362 H). First part, sermons one and two:

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Third Sermon 'Ashura – Misrepresentations and Distortions

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.

I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan:

“So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings, and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of.”

(5:13)

We stated earlier that the history of an event of such greatness as Karbala¹ has been subject to distortion at our hands both in respect of its external details as well as its meaning. By distortion of outward form we mean the accretions that we have piled up on the corpus of its history which have obscured its bright and luminous visage and disfigured its beautiful countenance. We cited some instances in this regard.

Distortions of Meaning

Regrettably this historic event has also been distorted in respect of its meaning, and corruption of meaning is much more dangerous than corruption of external detail. That which has made this great event ineffectual for us is the corruption of meaning, not that of external detail. That is, the evil effect of distortions in meaning is greater than those pertaining to external details.

What is meant by distortion of meaning? Without adding a single word or deleting a single word, it is possible to misinterpret a statement in such a manner that it gives a meaning exactly contrary to its real meaning.

I will give just one small example to illustrate this point. At the time that the early Muslims were building the Mosque of Madinah, 'Ammar Yasir was working hard, making an extraordinary amount of sincere effort. Among the reports that are of a definite authenticity is the one that the Noble Messenger (S) said to him at the time:

'Ammar, you will be killed by the rebellious faction. [1](#)

The term 'rebellious faction' (*al-fi'at al-baghiyah*) is Qur'anic, and it occurs in a verse which states that if two faction of Muslims fight one another and one of them is rebellious, one must take a stand against the rebellious faction and join on the side of the other faction so that the matters are set right.

“If two factions of believers fight, make peace between them, but if one of them rebels against the other, fight the one which is rebellious until it returns to God's command.” (49:9)

The statement, made by the Noble Messenger concerning 'Ammar, gave him great prestige. Accordingly, during the Battle of Siffin, when 'Ammar fought on the side of Imam 'Ali ('a), Ammar's presence in 'Ali's troops was considered a strong point in 'Ali's favour.

There were people with a weak faith who, until 'Ammar had not been killed, were not convinced that it was right for them to fight on Ali's side and lawful to kill Mu'awiyah and his soldiers.

But on the day that 'Ammar was killed at the hands of Mu'awiyah's soldiers, suddenly a cry rose from all

sides that the Prophet's prophesy had come true.

The best evidence of the unrighteousness of Mu'awiyah and his companions was that they were the killers of 'Ammar and the Prophet had informed years ago through his statement that 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction.[2](#)

On this day it became quite clear that the Mu'awiyah's troops represented the rebellious faction, that is, one which was unjust and unrighteous, and that justice lay on the side of 'Ali's army. Hence in accordance with the express injunction of the Qur'an one had to join the battle on 'Ali's side and against Mu'awiyah's army.

This incident demoralized Mu'awiyah's troops. Mu'awiyah, who always tried to make a headway by resorting to cunning and subterfuge, resorted to a misinterpretation. It was not possible to deny that the Prophet had made such a statement concerning 'Ammar, because perhaps there were at least five hundred persons who could bear witness that they had heard this statement from the Prophet himself or from someone who had heard it from the Prophet.

Accordingly, it was not possible to deny the fact of the prophesy concerning 'Ammar. The Syrians protested to Mu'awiyah, for it were they who had killed 'Ammar and the Prophet had said that he would be killed by a rebellious faction. Mu'awiyah told them, "You are mistaken. It is true that the Prophet said 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction and army.

But it were not we who killed 'Ammar." They said, "He was killed by our warriors." "No," he said, "'Ammar was killed by 'Ali who brought him here and provided the causes of his death."

'Amr ibn 'As had two sons. One of them was a worldly person like himself. The other one was a youth who was relatively a man of faith and he did not agree with his father's ways. His name was 'Abd Allah. 'Abd Allah was present in a gathering where this sophistry was put into effect. 'Abd Allah said, "What a false argument that it was 'Ali who has killed 'Ammar, as he was among his troops.

If that is so, then it was the Prophet who killed Hamzah, the Doyen of the Martyrs, as Hamzah was killed due to his presence in the Prophet's troops." This enraged Mu'awiyah and he said to 'Amr ibn As, "Why don't you check this ill-mannered son of yours!" This is what is called distortion of meaning.

How is the meaning of events and facts distorted?

Historical events and facts have on the one hand certain causes behind them, and, on the other, they are inspired by certain goals and motives. Misrepresentation of a historical event lies in ascribing to it causes and motives other than what they have actually been, or in attributing to it goals and motives other than what they in fact were.

For instance, you visit someone who has recently returned from a pilgrimage to Makkah. The purpose

you have in mind is that it is mustahabb to visit a hajji and so you go to see him. Someone makes a remark about your motives for the visit, describing them as an intention to propose your son's marriage with his daughter under the pretext of visiting a hajji returning from Makkah.

This is how he misrepresents your motive and purpose. This is what misrepresentation means.

The historic event of Karbala¹ had certain causes and motives behind it, as well as certain sublime goals. We Muslims and followers of Husayn ibn 'Ali have misrepresented this event in the same way as Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan distorted the meaning of the Prophet's statement concerning 'Ammar.

That is, Imam Husayn ('a) had certain goals and motives for staging his uprising and we have ascribed to him some other motives and goals.

The Character of a Sacred Movement

Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) made an uprising that was of unusual greatness and sanctity. The uprising of Abu 'Abd Allah possessed all the characteristics that make an uprising sacred, so much so that it is without a parallel in the entire history of the world. What are those characteristics?

1. The first condition of a sacred movement is that it should not have a purpose and end that is personal and pertaining to the individual but one which is universal, covering the entire humanity and human species.

At times persons make uprisings for personal goals, and sometimes they may launch a movement for the sake of society, or for the sake of mankind, for the sake truth, or for the sake of justice, equality and monotheism, and not for some personal goal. In such cases the struggle and movement is no longer for a personal cause.

One who wages such a struggle represents all human beings. That is why men whose actions and movements were not for the sake of personal motives and for the sake of humanity or for the sake of truth, justice and equality, and for the sake of tawhid and knowledge of God and for the sake of faith, are honored and loved by all people.

And that is why the Prophet (S) said: “Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn”³ We also say, “Husayn is from us and we from Husayn.” Why? Because Imam Husayn, may Peace be upon him, took a stand 1328 years ago⁴ for our sake and for the sake of all mankind. His uprising was sacred and holy and it transcended personal goals.

2. The second condition for an uprising to be sacred is that it should be inspired by a powerful vision and insight. To explain, suppose there is a society who people are unaware, ignorant, and without understanding.

There appears among them a man of vision and understanding who understands their ailments and their remedies a hundred times better than they do. At a time when others fail to understand and see, the man of vision sees very early and distinctly what other people fail to see at all. He comes forward and takes a stand.

Years pass. Twenty, thirty or fifty years later the people wake up and find out why he had risen up and they understand the sacred goals that he had sought to attain whose value and worth was not visible to their fathers and ancestors twenty, forty or fifty years ago.

To give an example, the marhum Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi [Afghani] launched an Islamic movement about sixty or seventy years ago in the Muslim countries (his death occurred in 1310 H./1892-93, fourteen years before the Constitution Movement in Iran). When you read today the history of this man, you see that he was truly a lone and solitary figure.

He knew the maladies of Muslims and their remedy while the people themselves did not. He was insulted and ridiculed by the people and they did not support him. Now after sixty or seventy years when the facts of history have become clearer we see that he understood things at that time which the people of Iran, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not.

Read at least two of the letters written by this great man. One of them was written to the marhum Ayatullah Mirza Shirazi Buzurg, may God elevate his station. The other was an open letter to the 'ulama' of Iran and is like a manifesto. Or read the letters written by him to marhum Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bujnardi at Mashhad, or to a certain eminent scholar of Isfahan or Shiraz.

See how well he understood the problems and how clearly he saw things, how well he knew the character of colonialism and what effective measures he took for awakening this ummah (pay no attention to things that are still said about him by some agents of colonialism, for as the proverb goes, 'this henna has lost its colour!').

His movement was sacred because it was launched by a man who appeared during a difficult era and who saw the reality behind the appearances which was invisible to and hardly understood by his contemporaries.

The movement of Imam Husayn is such a movement. Today we understand fully the character of Yazid and the implications of his rule. We know what Mu'awiyah did and what were the schemes of the Umayyads. But the Muslims of that era, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not understand these things, especially due to the absence of the media of the mass communication media which exist nowadays.

The people of Madinah did not understand the situation that existed. They came to know the character of Yazid and the implications of his caliphate when Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed. They were shocked and they asked themselves why he had been killed. They sent a delegation to Syria consisting of some eminent persons of Madinah and led by a man named 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, known as "Ghasil al-

Mala'ikah.”

Making the journey from Madinah to Syria when they reached Yazid's court, after staying there for some time they came to know the realities of the situation. On returning to Madinah they were asked as to what they had seen. They said, “All that we can tell you is that so long as we were in Damascus we were afraid lest stones should rain on our heads from the heaven.”

They told them they had seen a caliph who drank wine openly, gambled, and played with hounds and monkeys and had incestuous relations with women of his family.

Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah had eight sons. He said to his townsmen, “Whether you rise up or not, I will make an uprising even if I have to do it alone with my sons.” He fulfilled his words. In the uprising of Harrah against Yazid he sent forth his sons to fight.

They were martyred and he himself was martyred after them. 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah was not aware of the conditions two or three years earlier when Imam Husayn departed from Madinah. Where was he at the time when Husayn, as he prepared to leave Madinah, was saying:

One should bid farewell to Islam when the *ummah* is afflicted with such a ruler as Yazid?

Husayn ibn 'Ali had to be killed and the Muslim world had to receive a shock so that the likes of 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, the Ghassil al-Mala'ikah, and hundreds of people like him in Madinah, Kufah, and other places may open their eyes and say that Husayn ('a) was right in saying what he said.

3. The third characteristic of a sacred movement is its solitary and exclusive character; that is, it is like a flash of lightning in total darkness, a cry in the wilderness of silence, and a movement in the sea of absolute stillness. In conditions of total repression when the people cannot speak out, when there is total darkness, despair, absence of hope, and absolute silence and stillness, there appears suddenly a man and he breaks the magic silence and stillness.

He makes a movement and it is like a flash of light in the midst of surrounding darkness. It is then that others begin to stir and gradually start moving behind him and following him. Wasn't the uprising of Husayn such a movement? Yes, it was. Such was the movement that Imam Husayn launched. But what were his objectives in launching it?

Why were the Infallible Imams so insistent that the tradition of mourning Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a) should always remain alive? There is no need for us to look far for the reasons. Husayn ibn 'Ali himself has declared the reasons behind his movement:

Indeed, I have not risen up to do mischief, neither as an adventurer, nor to cause corruption and tyranny. I have risen up solely to seek the reform of the Ummah of my grandfather (s).

He says in most explicit terms: “Our society has become corrupt and the ummah of my Grandfather has

become degenerate. I have risen up to carry out reform and I am a reformer.”

I want to command what is good and stop what is wrong, and (in this) I follow the conduct of my grandfather and my father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Don't you see that righteousness is not acted upon and vice goes unforbidden. In such a situation, the man of faith yearns for the meeting with his Lord ... I see death as nothing but felicity and life under oppressors as nothing but disgrace.

Imam Husayn ('a) says, “I have risen up to carry out *amr bil ma'ruf*, to revive the faith, and to struggle against corruption. My movement is one which is Islamic and aimed at reform.”

But what we say is something else. We have made two skillful manipulations which are very amazing (I don't know whether I should say skillful or ignorant). In one of these cases, we said that Husayn ibn 'Ali rose in order to be killed for the sake of the atonement of the sins of the ummah.

Now if someone were to ask us as to the source of this notion, whether it was Imam Husayn ('a) himself who said such a thing or if it was the Prophet or some Imam, we cannot cite any authority. But still we keep on insisting that Imam Husayn got killed so that our sins are atoned. I don't know whether we have borrowed this notion from Christianity. Muslims have unwittingly adopted many ideas from Christendom which are contrary to Islam.

One of the doctrines of Christianity is the notion of the crucifixion of Christ as a sacrifice made for the sake of the atonement of man's sins. Jesus is called 'the Sacrifice,' and it is an essential part of the Christian doctrine that Jesus went upon the cross for atoning the sins of his people. They have made Jesus carry the burden of their sins!

However, we did not suspect that this notion belongs to Christianity and that it is consistent neither with the spirit of Islam nor with the statements of Husayn ('a) himself. By God, it is a calumny if we ascribe such a thing to Abu 'Abd Allah ('a)! By God, should one attribute such a notion to Husayn ibn 'Ali while he is keeping a fast in the month of Ramadan and claim that Husayn's martyrdom was for the sake of such a purpose and should he ascribe such a statement to him, his fast would be void for ascribing a falsehood to the Imam. Abu 'Abd Allah rose to struggle against sin, whereas we said that he rose in order to be a refuge for sinners!

We claim that Imam Husayn founded an insurance company to guarantee security to sinners! He has insured us against the consequences of sin in return for our tears. All that we have to do is to shed tears for him and in return he guarantees immunity to the sinners.

Now one could be whatever one liked to be, one could be an Ibn Ziyad or 'Umar ibn Sa'd, as if one 'Umar ibn Sa'd, one Sinan ibn Anas, and one Khuli were not enough! Imam Husayn wanted that the likes of Khuli and 'Umar ibn Sa'd should proliferate in the world and so he came and announced: 'O people, be

as evil as you can be, for I am your security!”

There is a second misrepresentation involved in interpreting the event of Karbala¹. According to it, Imam Husayn made an uprising and was killed in order to carry out a special command that was solely addressed to him. He was told to go and get martyred. So his action does not relate to us and it is not something which can be followed and emulated: it does not relate to those precepts of Islam which are general and universal.

See, what a great difference there is between what the Imam declares and what we say! Imam Husayn cried out that the causes and motives of his uprising are matters that coincide with the general principles of Islam. There was no need for a special order. After all special orders are given in situations where the general prescription is not adequate.

Imam Husayn declared in unequivocal terms that Islam is a religion that does not permit any believer (he did not say, an Imam) to remain indifferent in the face of oppression, injustice, perversity and sin. Imam Husayn established a practical ideology which is the same as the ideology of Islam. Islam had set forth its principles and Husayn put them into effect.

We have divested this event of its ideological character. When it is shorn of its ideological character, it is no more capable of being followed, and when it can not be followed, one cannot make any use of Imam Husayn's teaching and draw any lesson from the event of Karbala¹. We have rendered this event barren from the viewpoint of being beneficial and useful.

Could there be a worse kind of treachery? This is the reason why I say that the distortion in the meaning of the event of 'Ashura' is a hundred times more dangerous than textual corruption.

Why did the Infallible Imams (and there are even traditions from the Noble Messenger in this regard) want this movement to be kept alive? that it should not be consigned to oblivion?—that the people should mourn Imam Husayn? What was the objective that led them to issue this command?

We have distorted that objective, declaring that their only goal was that the mourning ceremonies are to be held for the sake of offering consolation to Hadrat Zahra¹, may Peace be upon her. Although she is with her great son in Paradise, we imagine that she is continually restless and full of sorrow, so she should be given consolation by the mourning of such worthless people as us! Can there be a greater insult of Hadrat Zahra¹ than this notion?

Some others say that Imam Husayn was murdered without any guilt at Karbala¹ at the hands of a group of aggressors and this was a tragedy. It is true that Imam Husayn was killed without any guilt. But is this all there is to the event that an innocent person was murdered by a group of aggressors!? Every day a thousand innocent persons are killed and wiped out throughout the world by criminals, and this is of course a tragic fact.

But does this kind of death have such a value that one should go on expressing sorrow over it and continue to mourn it year after year, for years, or rather for centuries, for ten and twenty centuries, expressing sorrow and regretting that Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed without guilt and that his innocent blood was shed for no reason by aggressors? But who can dare say that Husayn ibn 'Ali's death was in vain and his blood was shed futilely?

If one can find anyone in the whole world who did not allow one drop of his blood to be wasted, that is Husayn ibn 'Ali. If you can find anyone in the whole world who did not let one particle of his personality to go waste it is Husayn ibn 'Ali. He set such a high value for every single drop of his blood that it is indescribable!

If you take into account the amount of wealth that has been and is spent for his sake and will continue to be spent until the day of Judgment, you will see that humanity has spent billions and trillions for every drop of his blood.

Can anyone say that a man wasted his life whose death, for ever and ever, sends out tremors through the castles of the oppressors?—that his blood went in vain? Is his martyrdom to be saddening for us because Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed in vain?

It is we, wretched and ignorant people that we are, I and you, whose lives go waste. We should grieve for ourselves! You insult Husayn ibn Ali when you say that his life was lost in vain! Husayn ibn 'Ali is someone about whom it is said.

Indeed you have a station with God which cannot be attained except through martyrdom.

Did Husayn ibn 'Ali desire to die a vain death when he aspired for martyrdom?

The Imams have exhorted us to keep alive the tradition of mourning over Husayn ibn Ali because his goal was a sacred goal. Husayn ibn 'Ali established a school, and they wanted his school to remain alive and flourish.

You will not find a practical school of thought in the whole world that may be likened to that of Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a). If you can find a single another example of Husayn ibn 'Ali, you may ask why we should revive his memory every year.

If you can find another example of that which was manifested in Husayn ibn 'Ali during the event of 'Ashura', in those ordeals and taxing conditions, of the meaning of twahid, of faith, of the knowledge of God, of perfection, convinced faith in the other world, of resignation and submission, of fortitude and manliness, of self contentment, of steadiness and steadfastness, of honor and dignity, of the love and quest for freedom, of concern for mankind, of the passion to serve humanity—if you can find a single example in the whole world, then you may question the need to refresh his memory every year. But he is unique and without a parallel.

Keeping alive the memory of his name and his movement is for the purpose that our spirits may be illumined by the light of the spirit of Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a).

If a tear that we shed for him should signify a harmony between our souls and his spirit, it represents a brief flight that our spirit makes along with Husayn's spirit. Should it create within us a little glow of his valor, a particle of his free nature, a particle of his faith, a particle of his piety, and a small spark of his tawhid, such a tear has an infinite value.

They have said that it has the worth of an entire world even if it is so small as the 'wing of a gnat.' Believe it! But that is not a tear shed for a pointless death, but a tear for the greatness of Husayn and his great spirit, a tear that signifies harmony with Husayn ibn 'Ali and of movement in his steps. Yes, such a tear has an incalculable worth even if it is so small as a gnat's wing.

They wanted this practical ideology to remain for ever before the people's view, to witness that the Prophet's family are a proof and testimony of the truthfulness of the Prophet himself. If it is said that a certain Muslim warrior displayed great faith and valor in such and such a battle against Iran or Byzantine, for instance, it is not so much of an evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness as when it is said that the Prophet's son did such and such an act.

A leader's family is always subject to more suspicion and doubt than any of his followers. But when we observe the family of the Prophet at the highest summit of faith and sincerity, that is the best evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness. No one was so close to the Prophet (S) like 'Ali ('a). He grew up by the Prophet's side. No one had a faith in the Prophet like him or was more dedicated to the Prophet. This is the first evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness.

Husayn is the Prophet's son. When he manifests his faith in the Prophet's teaching it is a manifestation of the Prophet himself. Things which are always declared by human beings verbally but are rarely observed in practice are clearly visible in Husayn's being. What makes a human being so undefeatable? Subhan Allah! See the heights to which a human being can rise!

See how undefeatable is the spirit of the human being whose body bears wounds from head to foot, his young sons have been cut to pieces before his very eyes, he is suffering from extreme thirst and when he looks up at the sky it appears dark in his eyes, he sees that the members of his family will be taken captive, he has lost all that he had and all that has remained for him is his own undefeatable spirit.

Show me such a spectacle of human greatness in an event other than Karbala' and I will celebrate its memory instead of Karbala! Accordingly, we should keep alive the memory of such an event, of a group of seventy-two persons who defeated the spirit of a host of thirty thousand. How did they inflict such a defeat? Firstly, though a minority facing certain death, not a single one of them pined the enemy's side.

Yet some men from the thirty thousand pined their ranks, including one of their commanders, Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi and another thirty. This indicates the moral victory of this group and the defeat of the other

one. 'Umar ibn Sa'd took certain measures in Karbala' which disclose his moral defeat. In Karbala' 'Umar ibn Sa'd's men refrained from a man-to-man encounter during the battle. At first they complied in accordance with the custom prevalent in those days, before launching an all-out attack and shooting arrows.

The man-to-man fight was a kind of contest in which one man from one side fought a man from the other. After several men were killed in these encounters with the companions of Imam Husayn, strengthening their morale, 'Umar ibn Sa'd ordered his men to refrain from man-to-man fights.

When did Abu 'Abd Allah come to the field for the final battle? Imagine, it is afternoon on the day of 'Ashura'. Until this time there were still several of his companions who offered the prayers with him. He has been very busy from the morning until the afternoon of that day as it was he, most of the time, who has brought the bodies of his companions from the battlefield and placed them in the tent of the martyrs.

He himself has rushed to the side of his companions in their last moments and it is he himself who consoles and reassures his family members. Apart from all this, there is his personal grief for the dear ones that he has lost. He is the last of all to come into the field of battle. They imagine that it would be a simple task to deal with Husayn in such a circumstance.

But he does not give a moment's reprieve to any contestant that dares to come forward to combat him. 'Umar ibn Sa'd then cries out: "Woe to you! Do you know whom you are fighting? This is the son of the most fatal of Arab warriors. He is the son of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. By God, his father's soul is in his body. Don't fight him singly!"

Wasn't this an indication of defeat? Thirty thousand men combat against a single man, lonely and solitary, who has suffered all those sorrows and ordeals., and who has been through the arduous and grueling labors of the day, thirsty and hungry, and he defeats them and makes them flee.

They faced a defeat not only against the sword of Abu 'Abd Allah but also his logic and eloquence. Abu 'Abd Allah delivered two or three sermons on the day of 'Ashura' before the commencement of his battle. These sermons are truly amazing.

Those who practice the act of oration know that it is not possible for someone in an ordinary state to say things which are sublime or at the height of sublimity. One's spirit must be in a state of fervour, especially if the oration is of an elegiac character. It is only with a heart burning with feeling that one can deliver a good elegy.

If one wants to compose a ghazal, he must be strongly moved with the passion of love so as to say a good ghazal. If one wishes to compose epic poetry, he must be moved with warlike emotions.

When Abu 'Abd Allah began his address, especially the sermon that he made on the day of 'Ashura', which is one of the most elaborate of his sermons, 'Umar ibn Sa'd was alarmed by the effect it might

have on his men's morale. The Imam alighted from his horse and mounted a camel in order to make the sermon, as he wanted to make his voice heard better from a higher point.[5](#)

Words, which are truly reminiscent of the sermons of 'Ali ('a). Aside from the sermons of 'Ali we won't find a more powerful and vibrant sermon in the whole world. He spoke three times. 'Umar ibn Sa'd was frightened lest Husayn's sermon should change the minds of his troops.

The second time when Abu 'Abd Allah started to address them, due to the defeatist morale of the enemy, Umar ibn Sa'd ordered his men to hoot and beat their mouths with their hands so that no one could hear Husayn. Is that not an evidence of their defeat and the sign of Husayn's victory?

If a man has faith in God, in *tawhid*, if he has a link with God and faith in the other world, single-handedly he can inflict a moral defeat on a host of twenty and thirty thousand. Is this not a lesson for us? Where can you find another example of it?

Who else can you find in the whole world who could utter two sentences of that sermon in conditions in which Husayn ibn 'Ali spoke, or for that matter two sentences like the sermon of Zaynab ('a) at the city gates of Kufah?

If our Imams have told us to revive this mourning every year and to keep it alive for ever it is for the purpose that we may understand these points, that we may realize the greatness of Husayn, so that if we shed tears for him it is out of understanding.

Our knowledge of Husayn elevates us. It makes us human beings, free men, followers of truth and justice, and real Muslims. The school of Husayn is a man-making school, not a school that produces sinners. Husayn is the bastion of righteous conduct, not a citadel for sin and sinfulness.

The historians report that at daybreak on the day of 'Ashura', after offering the prayer with his companions, he turned to them and said, "Companions, get prepared. Death is nothing but a bridge that takes you across this world into another, from a world that is very coarse, hard and base to one that is sublime, noble and gentle."

These were his words. But now observe his conduct. The reports do not come from Husayn ibn 'Ali but from those who have chronicled the events. The episode has been reported even by Hilal ibn Nafi', who was accompanying 'Umar ibn Sa'd as his chronicler.

He says, al Husayn ibn 'Ali was astonishing to me. As the time of his martyrdom drew nearer and his ordeals became severer, his countenance appeared to be more refreshed and ruddier, like someone about to meet his beloved."

Even in the last moments when that accursed wretch approached him to sever his sacred head, he says, "When I approached Husayn ibn 'Ali and my eyes fell on him, the light and burnish of his face so gripped me that I forgot my intention to kill him:

The light of his face and its awe-inspiring beauty so gripped me that I was distracted from the thought of killing him.

They write that Abu Abd Allah had chosen a point for his combat which was nearer the tents of the womenfolk. That was for two reasons. Firstly, he knew the unmanly and inhuman character of the enemies. They lacked even the sense of honor to spare the tents of their attacks as it was he whom they were fighting.

Therefore he wanted to restrain them from attacking his camp so long as he was alive and had the strength to stop them. He would make a frontal attack and they would flee. But he would not pursue them but return to guard the tents of his womenfolk from any assault.

Secondly, so long as he was alive he wanted the members of his family to know that he was alive. Accordingly, he had chosen a point from where his voice could be heard by them. Whenever he returned after making an attack he would stand at that point and cry out:

There is no power or strength save that which derives from God, the Exalted and the Almighty.

His cries would reassure the women who knew that the Imam was still alive. The Imam had told them not to come out of the tents as long as he was alive (Don't believe those who say that the women kept running out every now and then. Never.

The Imam had ordered them to remain in the tents as long as he was alive). He had told them that they must not make any untoward utterance which might reduce their reward with God. He had told them that they would find deliverance and that their ultimate end would be a good one, that God will punish their enemies.

They did not have the Imam's permission to come out of their tents, and they did not. Husayn ibn Ali's sense of manly honor and their own sense of feminine honor did not permit them to come out. Accordingly, when they heard the Imam utter '*La hawl wala quwatta illa billahil aliyyil azim*', they felt reassured. And as the Imam had come back to them once or twice after bidding them farewell, they still expected the Imam to return.

In those days they used to train Arabic horses for the battlefield, as the horse is an animal that can be trained. Such a horse would show a particular reaction when its master were killed. The members of Abu 'Abd Allah's household were in the tents awaiting the Imam, that he might return to them once again and they might see his angelic visage one again. Suddenly they heard the sound of the neighing of the Imam's horse.

They rushed to the tent's door imagining that the Imam had come. But they saw the horse without its rider with its saddle overturned. It was then that the children and the women raised the cries of *Wa Husaynah!* and *Wa Muhammada!* They surrounded the horse and each of them began to mourn for him.

Mourning is part of human nature.

When a person wants to express his grief he mournfully addresses the heaven, or an animal, or some person. The Imam had told them that they must not weep or lament so long as he was alive. But of course they could mourn him when he died. And so in that state they began their lamentations.

They write that Husayn ibn 'Ali had a daughter named Sukaynah, whom he loved greatly. Later she grew up to become a learned lady of letters much revered and respected by all scholars and literary men.

This child was very dear to Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) and she too had an unusual love for her father. They write that this child uttered some sentences in the way of mourning which are very heartrending. In a mournful tone she addressed the horse and said:

O my father's stallion, my father was thirsty when he went out. Did they give him water or was he killed thirsty?'

That was at the time when Abu 'Abd Allah lay fallen on the ground.

[1.](#) al Halabi, Sirah v2, p77

[2.](#) Musnad, Ahmad b. Hanbal, v2, p199

[3.](#) al Mufid, al Irshad, p249, Alam al Wara, p216, Ibn Shahr Ashub, al Manaqib, v4, p71, Hilyat al abrar, v1, p560, Kashf al Ghummah, v2 pp10,61, Mulhaqt Ihqaq al haqq, v11, pp 256-279

[4.](#) This sermon was delivered in the year 1389 H, corresponding to Farvardin 1348 (March-April 1969)

[5.](#) al Masudi, Muruj al Dhahab, v3, p69

Fourth Sermon: 'Ashura – Popular Distortions and our Responsibility

In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.

I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan:

“So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearst hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings, and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of.”

(5: 13)

Our discussion concerning the distortions (*tahrifat*) in popular accounts of the historical event of Ashura consists of four parts:

1. The meaning of distortion (*tahrif*) in general.
2. A description of the distortions that have taken place in regard to the historic event of 'Ashura and their examples.
3. The factors responsible for these distortions and the causes that lead to *tahrif* in general and the special factors that have been particularly at play in relation to this historic event.
4. Our responsibility¹ in regard to these distortions, that is, the 'duty of the *'ulama*' as well as that of the common people.

Of these four, we have already discussed the first three parts in the previous sessions, and tonight, with God's grace, we will discuss the fourth topic.

To be certain, during the course of time gradually there have taken place distortions in this very great historic event, and there is no doubt that here we have a responsibility: to combat these distortions.

To state it more clearly, and to put it in somewhat self-important terms, it may be said that our generation has a mission to fight against these distortions and in misrepresentations of 'Ashura. But before we may discuss the responsibility of the scholars of the ummah (in other words, the *khawass*) and the responsibility of the people (that is, the *'awamm*), I would like to mention two points in the way of introduction.

The first point is that we should examine the past to see who has been responsible for these distortions, whether it were the scholars who were responsible for it or the common people. Next, what is our responsibility to today and who is to shoulder it?

Who has been responsible for it in the past? Usually in such cases the *'ulama* blame the people and the people put the blame on the *'ulama*. The *'ulama* say that the guilt lies with the people and their ignorance. They are so ignorant, ill-informed and un-worthy that they only deserve to be fed with such nonsense. They do not deserve to know the truth and the facts.

I heard it from the *marhum* Ayatullah Sadr, may God elevate his station, that Taj Nayshaburi would say absurd things from the *minbar*. Someone objected to him, saying, "What are these things that you say? You receive such big audiences, why don't you say some sensible things?" He replied that the people did not deserve it. Then he produced, so to speak, a 'proof' to substantiate his assertion.

The common people, the masses, also have an argument against the *'ulama* and the clerics which they often use. They say, "When a fish begins to rot, the rotting begins at the head. The scholars are like the head of the fish and we its tail." However, the fact is that in this case the responsibility and the guilt lies

both upon the *'ulama* as well as the laity.

One should know that the common people too share a responsibility in such cases. In cases such as this, it is the people who let the truth to be obliterated and spread superstitious nonsense.

There is a well-known tradition which is considered reliable by scholars. A man asked Imam Sadiq (a) concerning the Qur'anic verse:

“And among them are the illiterate folks who know not the Book but only vain hopes and nothing but conjectures.” (2:78)

Here God is critical of the common people from among the Jews. Although He refers to them as having been uneducated, unlettered and illiterate, nevertheless He considers them blameworthy. The questioner, while admitting that the *'ulama'* of the Jews¹ were indeed responsible, asks the Imam as to why the common people among them were held guilty. Was it not a valid excuse that they were illiterate commoners? The tradition is an elaborate one.

The Imam replies that such is not the case. He answers that there are certain matters that do require learning and which can only be understood by the learned and which illiterate people do not comprehend. Concerning such issues one may say that the common people are not responsible as they have not acquired learning in religious subjects. True, at times they may be held responsible for not having acquired education, and this could be an argument against them.

However, if there are cases where they have no responsibility, that is in issues which require the study of books and proper instruction under teachers. One who has never had any teacher and has never gone to school is not held responsible in such matters.

However, there are issues which a normal human being can understand with his natural faculty of a sound mind. Here it is not necessary for one to have gone to the school, to have read books and have had teachers. In other words, it does [not] require one to have a diploma or a degree or even to have received middle-school education. All that is needed is sanity and a sound mind.

Thereafter, the Imam gives an example. Suppose there is an *'alim* who preaches the people to be pious and Godfearing while he himself acts in a manner contrary to piety and Godfearing. He preaches what he himself does not practice and the people observe this contradiction between his word and deed. The Imam points out that it is not necessary for one to be educated and learned in order to see that such men are not worthy of being followed.

The common people among the Jews would observe these things with their own eyes and understand them with their minds (*wadtarru bi ma'arifi qulubihim*). ¹ With their natural intelligence they could perceive that one must not follow such persons, but in spite of that they would follow them. Therefore they were responsible and guilty.

There are some matters that do not require any education or training or any linguistic expertise in any particular language such as Arabic or Persian or any training in any of such subjects as grammar, law, jurisprudence, logic or philosophy.

All that is needed is the natural gift of intelligence and they (the common people among the Jews) did possess this. They perceived these things with their natural intelligence. The Noble Prophet (s) has a saying which is one of the profoundest because of its innate self-evident character. He said:

The value of works depends solely on intentions, and everyone's recompense depends on his intentions.²

It means that the significance and worth of one's actions depends on one's intentions. If you do something unintentionally you are not guilty if it is something bad and if it is something good you do not deserve any reward.

Now if someone were to come and relate a dream and a story about someone who is forgiven his sins and admitted to the highest stations of paradise due to something that happened to him in a condition of unconsciousness in which his will and intention had played no role whatsoever, or rather his real intentions were quite the opposite, should we accept such a thing?

Does it require book learning? Does it need literacy or the knowledge of Arabic? Only repentance and a return to God can free one from his sins:

“Verily good deeds obliterate evil deeds.” (11:114)

It is good deeds that wipe out the traces left by evil deeds. But involuntary actions are not such. However, we fail to use our God-given intelligence to make correct judgements.

In some books they have written that once upon a time there was a robber who used to waylay travellers, rob them and kill them. One day he came to know that a caravan of pilgrims bound for the holy shrine in Karbala was on its way. He came and hid himself in a mountain pass lying there in wait to waylay the pilgrims bound for the shrine of Imam Husayn, to rob them of their belongings and to kill them if necessary.

While he waited for the caravan to reach, suddenly he fell asleep. The caravan came and passed by while he remained asleep. In that state he saw a dream. It was the scene of the day of resurrection and he was being taken towards hell. Why? Because he had not performed a single good deed in his life. All he had done was wickedness and crime.

He was taken to the verge of hell but hell refused to accept him. Why? Because as this man slept by the wayside as the pilgrim caravan passed, the dust raised by the feet of the pilgrims of Imam Husayn's shrine had settled on his body and clothes.

As a result of this involuntary act all his sins were forgiven without his having any conscious intention, or rather despite his intention to kill the pilgrims, and contrary to the declaration of the Prophet that “the value of actions depends solely on intentions, and everyone's recompense depends on his intentions.” [There is even a couplet that has been composed on the theme.]

Indeed, hell shall not touch a body, whereupon lies the dust of the feet of Husayn's pilgrims!

It is a nice line poetically, but is unfortunately untrue from the viewpoint of the teaching of Imam Husayn.

The second point, which I must mention before describing this responsibility and duty relates to the dangers that lie in these distortions. Let us briefly discuss the dangers that lie in distortion of facts. We have already discussed the various kinds of distortion that have occurred in relation to the historic event of 'Ashura and the factors responsible for such distortions. It is possible that some people might think, 'After all what is wrong with *tahrif*?'

What harm can it do and how can it create any danger?' The answer is that the danger of *tahrif* is extraordinarily great. *Tahrif* is an indirect blow which is more effective than a direct one. If a book is corrupted (whether in respect of its wording, or its meaning and content) and it is a book of guidance, it is transformed into a book that is misleading.

If it is a book of human felicity it is transformed into a book of human wretchedness. If it is a book that edifies and elevates human beings, as a result of corruption it is changed into one that brings man's fall and degeneration. Basically it alters the very form of reality and not only makes it ineffective it has a reverse effect.

Everything is prone to certain hazards which are related to its nature. The Noble Prophet (s) said:

There are three hazards for religion: the scholar of evil conduct, the tyrannical leader (ruler), and the person who is diligent in practising religion but is ignorant.³

That is, there are three dangers for religion: 1) scholars who are evil and vicious in their conduct; 2) leaders who are tyrannical and unjust; 3) devout persons who are ignorant. The Prophet has considered them hazards for the faith.

In the same way that plants and animals are affected by certain pests and diseases, and in the same way as the human body is prone to certain diseases and disorders, religion, creed and faith are also prone to certain dangers.

Distortions of the faith, which are brought about by two out of the three categories of people mentioned by the Noble Prophet, that is, scholars of evil conduct and ignorant and sanctimonious persons, are a hazard for the faith and are destructive for religion. Corruption and distortion alter the content of a message of deliverance and the people who accept it as the truth derive an opposite result.

Ali (a), a figure with all that greatness, has a strangely distorted personality in the outlook of some people. Some people know Ali (a) only as an athlete. At times some people of very suspect motives publish pictures of Ali that show him bearing in hand a two-tongued sword, like a pythons tongue, and with facial features and expression one does not know from where they have got them. It is definite that a picture or statue of Ali or that of the Prophet never existed.

They have painted such a strange face that one can hardly believe that it is the same Ali famous for his justice, the Ali who wept at nights for the fear of God. The face of a devout man, of someone who is used to nightly worship, of someone who engages in *istighfar* at nights, the face of a sage, a judge, a man of letters is a different face.

There is another thing which is quite popular especially amongst us Iranians. We refer to the Fourth Imam (a) as “Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin-e *Bimar*” (i.e. the sick one). In no language do we ever come across the epithet *bimar* along with the name of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin. Such an epithet does not exist in Arabic.

He has a number of appellations, one of which is *al-Sajjad* (i.e. one who prostrates a lot), another is *Dhu al-Thafanat* (i.e. one who has callouses on his forehead, due to prostrations). Do you find any book in Arabic that may contain an epithet synonymous with the word *bimar* for the Imam?

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (a) was only ill during the days of the episode of ‘Ashura (perhaps it was an act of providence meant to save the Imam’s life and to preserve the progeny of Imam Husayn) and this very illness saved his life.

Several times they wanted to kill the Imam, but as he was seriously ill, they would leave him saying, *Innahu li-ma bih*⁴ i.e., Why should we kill him. He is himself dying. Who in the world has not fallen ill at some time or another during his life?

Apart from this instance of his illness, see if you can find any other reference stating that Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin was sick. But we have pictured Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin as someone chronically ill, pale faced, suffering from fever and as someone bent with weakness and always carrying a walking stick and someone who moans as he walks !

The same distortion and lie about the Imam’s figure has led some people to continually groan and moan and make themselves appear as chronically sick so that people may revere them for that and say, “Look at him, he is just like Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin the *Bimar*!” This is distortion. Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin was not any different from Imam Husayn (a) or Imam Baqir (a) in respect of physical health and constitution.

The Imam lived for forty years after the event of Karbala’ and he was quite healthy like others and was not different from Imam Sadiq (a), for instance, in this regard. Why should we then call him “Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin the *Bimar*”⁵

Imamate means being a inodel and an exemplar. The philosophy of the Imam’s existence is that he is a human being of a superhuman calibre, like the prophets, who introduced themselves in these words so

that the people may follow them as higher models of humanity:

I am only a mortal like you, (and) it has been revealed to me that your God is One God. (18:110)

However, when the countenance of these figures is distorted to a great degree they are no more capable of serving as models. That is, instead of being beneficial, following and emulating such imaginary figures gives an opposite result. Thus we have seen briefly the great danger that lies in *tahrif*. Actually *tahrif* is an indirect blow and a stab in the back.

The Jews are the world champion of *tahrif*. No people in world history have carried out *tahrif* to the extent that they have done. For the same reason no one has ever delivered a great blow to humanity by distorting facts and fabricating falsehoods.

Our Responsibility and Mission:

You should know that we have a serious responsibility in this regard, especially in the present times. One cannot serve the people with a distorted version of the truth, neither was it possible in the past. It was unproductive also in the past, but its harm was lesser.

Its harm is much greater in this era. Our greatest responsibility is to see what distortions have occurred in our history; to see what distortions have occurred in the presentation of our eminent figures and personalities, and what misinterpretations have occurred in the Qur'an.

There has been no textual corruption in the Qur'an. It means that not a single word has been added to it nor a word has been deleted from it. However, the danger of distortion of the meanings of the Qur'an is as serious as any textual corruption.

What is meant by distortion of meanings of the Qur'an? It means interpreting the Qur'an in a wrong and misleading manner. Such a thing should not be permitted to take place. We should see what kind of distortions have taken place in our history in historical episodes such as the historic event of 'Ashura, which must always remain a source of lesson and education for us, being a document of moral and social training and education. We should combat such distortions.

The Duty of the 'Ulama and the People:

What is the duty of the '*ulama*' of the Ummah in this regard and the duty of the common people, the masses?

I want to make a general remark concerning the responsibility of the '*ulama*'. The deviation of an '*alim*' lies in always confronting passively the weak points and shortcomings of the people. Spiritual, moral and social weak points are a kind of sickness. In bodily illness the sick person is usually conscious of his illness and he himself seeks his own treatment.

But in spiritual illnesses that which makes things difficult is that the sick person does not know that he is sick. On the contrary he considers his illness a sign of health. He even has a liking for his illness. It is not the case that individuals are conscious of their weak points and accept them as such; rather they consider them as their strong points! It is the *'alim* who understands the weak points of his community

When an *'alim* is faced with a weak point of the community he has two alternatives before him:

1) He may struggle against these weak points, and such a person is called a reformer (*muslih*). A reformer is one who fights against the weak points of the people. The people usually do not like him.

2) He may consider it a difficult and formidable task to combat the weak points of the people. He may conclude that there is not only no reward to be obtained in fighting the people's weak points, but there are also disadvantages. Accordingly, he exploits their weakness.

It is here that he becomes an instance of 'the vicious scholar' (*faqih fajir*) who according to the Noble Prophet (s) is one of the three hazards and pestilences of the faith.

I will not discuss other problems here but will confine myself to the issue of the event of 'Ashura. The common people have two weak points in relation to the mourning ceremonies held for Imam Husayn (a).

One of them is that – to the extent I have come across in my own experience (and I have not yet encountered any exception) – usually those who arrange and organize the mourning gatherings (*majalis*), whether they are held in mosques or at homes, want the *majalis* to draw good attendance. They are satisfied if there is a substantial crowd and are unhappy if the attendance is sparse. This is a weak point.

These sessions are not held to draw crowds. Our purpose is not to hold a parade or a march past. The purpose is to become acquainted with the truths and to fight against distortions. This is a weak point which the speaker has to reckon with.

Should he fight this weak point or should he exploit it like Taj Nayshaburi? Should he wish to combat this weak point it would not be compatible with the objectives of the organizers and holders of the *majlis* as well as with the wishes of the audience who like to get together and love tumult and fanfare.

Should he want to exploit this weak point then all that may bother him is how to draw larger crowds. It is here that an *'alim* stands at a crossroad: now that these people are fools and have such a weak point, should I exploit it, or should I struggle against it and go after the truth?

Another weak point present in the mourning gatherings – which is mostly from the people's side and has fortunately become lesser – is that profuse and loud weeping is regarded as the criterion of their success. After all the speaker on the *minbar* must relate the sorrowful accounts of the tragic events. While these accounts are related, the people are expected not merely to shed tears: the mere shedding of tears is not acceptable; the *majlis* must be rocked with cries of mourning.

I do not say that the *majlis* should not be rocked with mourning; what I say is that this must not be the objective. If tears are shed as a result of listening to facts and the *majlis* is rocked with mourning by descriptions of real history without false and fabricated narratives, without distortion, without conjuring companions for Imam Husayn that did not exist in history and who are unknown to Imam Husayn himself (as they were nonexistent), without attributing such children to Imam Husayn as did not exist, without carving out enemies for Imam Husayn that basically had not existed – that is very good indeed.

But when reality and truth are absent, should we go on making war against Imam Husayn by fabricating falsehoods and lies?

This is a weak point of the common people. What is to be done? Should it be exploited? Should we exploit it for our interests and take them for a ride? Should we, like Taj Nayshaburi, say that as the people are stupid, we should make use of their stupidity? No! Our greatest responsibility and the *'ulama's* biggest duty is to struggle against the weak points of society. That is why that the Noble Prophet (s) said: –

When heresies and fabrications appear in my Ummah, the *'alim* must declare what he knows, otherwise he will be cursed by God.⁶

That is: when falsehoods and fabrications appear and when things become popular which are not part of the religion, things which the Prophet (s) has not prescribed, it is the duty of the learned to declare the truth even if the people do not like it. And may curse of God be upon him who hides the facts. The Noble Qur'an itself has declared in stronger terms:

“Those who conceal what We have revealed of the clear signs and guidance, after We have made them clear for the people in the Book, God shall curse them and they will be cursed by all the cursers.” (2:159)

It means, the learned who conceal the truths declared by Us, who know the facts but conceal them and refrain from expressing them, may the curse of God be upon them and the curse of everyone who curses. The duty of the *'ulama* during the era of the last prophesy is to struggle against *tahrif*. Fortunately the means for such a task are also available and there are, and have been, persons among the *'ulama* who combat such weak points.

The book *Lu'lu' wa marjan* was written on this very topic of the event of 'Ashura and I have mentioned it earlier. It is by the *marhum* Hajji Nuri (may God be pleased with him) and its purpose is precisely to carry out a campaign in this regard, a most sacred duty which has been fulfilled by that great man, whose work is an instance of the first part of the above-mentioned *hadith*:

When heresies and fabrications appear in my Ummah, the *'alim* must declare what he knows ...

It is the duty of the *'ulama* to state in clear terms the facts relating to this case to the people even if they

do not like it. It is the duty of the *'ulama* to combat falsehoods. It is the duty of the *'ulama* to expose the liars. The jurists (*fuqaha*) have made certain remarks concerning the issue of back-biting (*ghibah*). They say that there are certain exceptions where back-biting is permissible. Among cases relating to these exceptions is one where all the major *'ulama* have committed this kind of *ghibah*, considering it necessary and even obligatory.

This is the case of *jarh*, where the standing of a narrator (*rawi*) is critically examined. Suppose a person narrates a tradition from the Prophet (s) or from one of the Imams (a). Is one to accept his statements immediately? No. One must investigate his background to see what kind of man he was, whether a truthful person or a liar.

If you discover a weak point in the life of this person, a shortcoming, a defect, an instance of lying or misconduct, it is not only lawful for you but even obligatory (*wajib*) to discredit this person in your books.

This is called *jarh*. Although it is *ghibah* and it amounts to casting disrepute on someone – which is in general not a lawful thing to do whether the subject is dead or alive – but in this case where the matter is that of distortion of the truth and its *tahrif*, one must discredit him and the liar must be exposed and discredited.

Someone may be a great scholar in a certain field, such as Mulla Husayn Kashifi, who was a very learned religious scholar. But his *Rawdat al-shuhada* is replete with lies. No one has been spared of his lies. Even Ibn Ziyad and 'Umar ibn Sa'd are victims of his lies.

He has written that Ibn Ziyad gave fifty camel-loads (*kharwar*) of gold to 'Umar ibn Sa'd so as to make him go to Karbala' to do what he did. (Anyone who hears such a story might think that if such is the case one cannot put much blame on 'Umar ibn Sa'd. There are many who would do such a thing if given fifty camel-loads of gold.)

There is a general agreement about Mulla Darbandi that he was a good man. Even *marhum* Hajji Nuri, who criticizes his book, and with justification, says that he was a good man. This man was sincerely devoted to Imam Husayn (a) and it is said that whenever he heard Imam Husayn's name mentioned tears would come into eyes.

He was also quite well-versed in *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*. He imagined himself to be a jurist (*faqih*) of the first rank. However; that was not the case. He was a jurist of second or at least third rank. He wrote a book named *Khaza'in* (lit. 'treasures') which is a complete course in *fiqh* and has been published. He was a contemporary of the author of the *Jawahir* (lit. 'jewels'). He asked the author of the *Jawahir* as to what title he had given to his book. He said, '*Jawahir*.'

As the title of his own book was *Khaza'in*, he said, "There are many of such *jawahir* in our *khaza'in*." However, the *Jawahir* has been reprinted ten times and there is no jurist who does not use it or can do without it. The *Khaza'in* was printed only once and thereafter no one went after it. Although it has a

thousand pages, it is not worth more than the paper used to print it.

This man, in spite of being a scholar, wrote the *Asrar al-shahadah* in which he has totally distorted the event of Karbala, altering it and twisting it out of shape, making it ineffective and inconsequential. His book is full of lies. Now should we keep our silence about him because he was a scholar, a pious man and devoted to Imam Husayn? Should not Hajji Nuri give his opinion about his *Asrar al-shahadah*? Of course, he must be subjected to *jarh* and this is the duty of an *'alim*.

We beseech God, the Blessed and the Exalted, to lead our hearts towards the truth, to forgive us the sins which we have committed through *tahrif* and otherwise, to grant us the ability to carry out successfully the duty and mission that we have in this field.

[1.](#) Al-Tabrisi, al-Ihtijaj, vol.2, p.457.

[2.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar, vol. 7, p. 225; al-Jami' al-saghir, vol. 1, p. 3.

[3.](#) Al-Jami' al-saghir, vol. 1, p. 4.

[4.](#) Bihar al-anwar, vol. 45, p. 61; A'lam al-wara, p. 246; ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, al-Irshad, p. 242.

[5.](#) In the late Ayati (r), may God have mercy upon him, we have lost an invaluable asset. Five or six years ago this great man gave a lecture on the method of tabligh in one of the monthly sessions of a religious association. It was published in the second volume of Guftar-e mah. There he raised this very issue. He said, "What is this absurd notion that we attribute sickness to Imam Zayn al-Abidin? We have given such an appellation to the Imam that anyone who hears it imagines that the Imam was sick all his life." Then he related an episode that had occurred recently He said, "Some time ago I read an article in one of the periodicals where the author had complained about the plight of the government and government employees, stating that most of the government servants and officials were either incompetent or corrupt. They were either competent and corrupt, or honest and incompetent." He had cited verbatim the words of the author; who had written, "Most of the government officials are either of the type of Shimr or that of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin-e Bimar; whereas we need persons who are competent like Hadrat Abbas." He meant that Shimr was corrupt and competent, whereas Imam Zayn al-'Abidin-e Bimar was pious but – na'udhubillah – incompetent, and that Hadrat Abbas was both pious and competent. See how an apparently small distortion leads to such a great deviation.

[6.](#) Safinat al-bihar, vol. 1, p. 63; Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 54.

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