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In the name of ALLAH, the Merciful the Compassionate

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PAPERS FROM THE IMAM ḤUSAYN CONFERENCE LONDON, JULY 1984

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**PAPERS FROM
THE
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CONFERENCE
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Because of the size of this volume it has been decided not to publish the Autumn issues 1985 and 1986 of this journal.

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PREFACE

This special number of *Al-Serāt* contains papers which were either presented at, or, in some cases, subsequently submitted in longer written form to, the International Conference on the Imam Ḥusayn held in London from the 6th to the 9th of July, 1984. The event was jointly organized by the Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre, Toronto, Canada, to commemorate the 1400th *hijrī* anniversary of the birth of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the third Sh‘ī Imam and grandson of Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, in 4 AH. Further details of the conference and speakers can be found in: Maryam Wdlings, ‘Report on the International Seminar on Imam Ḥusayn. peace be upon him’, *Al-Serāt* X/2 (Autumn, 1984), 3-12.

The papers have been arranged thematically under three headings, and within these headings the order is alphabetical, according to author. Given both the variety of ways in which the subjects were treated in the papers themselves, and the different backgrounds of the contributors, only an absolute minimum of uniformity has been imposed by the editors, and, while it is hoped that consistency has been maintained within each paper, such consistency should not be looked for between them. Dates, for example, usually appear in their *hijrī* form, but in some places they are given according to the Christian calendar, or in both forms; it should be clear from the context which system is being used. Qur’ānic quotations have been given throughout in the form of, e.g., 2:156. without further indication. The transliteration of Arabic names and terms follows the usual style of *Al-Serāt*, but in the case of other languages the editors have generally retained the transliterations given by each author.

The Muhanimadi Trust would like to thank the contributors and organizers for their cooperation and assistance, and for their kind patience in awaiting the delayed publication of these papers. In particular, they would like to thank Mahmoud Ayoub and Azim Nanji for their help and advice in the preparation of this volume, and Lynda Clarke for her translation of Professor al-Janhānī's contribution.

INTRODUCTION

This publication of the proceedings of the conference to commemorate the 1400th *hijra* anniversary of the birth of the Sayyid al-Shuhadā', the Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, gives me the opportunity to say a few words of introduction about the Muhammadi Trust and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre for those who do not already know about their operations and activities. The Muhammadi Trust was established in the United Kingdom in 1973, with its registered office in London, for the purpose, *inter alia*, of encouraging Islamic studies and disseminating knowledge of Islamic teachings: and its sister organization, the Muhammadi Islamic Centre of Canada, was set up in 1979, with the additional aim of awarding fellowships to students and scholars of Islam, and it has recently been registered under the name of the Muhammadi Islamic Foundation so as to allow it greater freedom and independence in its activities. Both organizations are anxious to strengthen unity among all Muslims, and, in particular, the youth. In pursuit of these objectives, the Trust has published a number of books and booklets in the English language. Some of these are translations of Arabic books on religious themes and topics, written by renowned scholars, and some are original works by scholars of international repute who have contributed to the study of Islam. The Trust also publishes a journal, *Al-Serāt*, which prints articles on religious topics by eminent writers. Those who are familiar with this journal know that the utmost importance is given to the quality and standard of the articles, and, at the same time, full freedom to express views is allowed the writers so as to permit the publication of articles propounding diverse views with which the publishers may not necessarily agree. This effort of the Trust is directed towards the dissemination in English of knowledge concerning Islam in all its aspects.

Although a large body of literature on Islam exists in oriental languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, there is, in contrast, a dearth of such literature in English. Yet English is the only language with which our younger generation living in the Western world is familiar.

The diffusion and dissemination of knowledge is, according to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the religious duty of every Muslim, man or woman. The Prophet of Islam has enjoined us to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave. As Sa'di said,

پے علم چوں شمع باید گداخت کہ بے علم نتواں خدا را شناخت

'to kindle the light of knowledge, one must necessarily melt like a candle; for how can one understand the divine Being without the glow of learning.'

I will now say just a few words as my humble tribute to the great Imam whose memory we have honoured in this conference. As a gem of the purest rays, serenest sparkles and reflected light, the life of the Imam Ḥusayn mirrors the light of guidance through its every facet. It is no wonder that the Imam Ḥusayn is looked upon as an ideal by all who believe in righteous causes, who believe that no sacrifice is too great for the achievement of a noble aim, who believe that death for a righteous cause is the very acme of noble living and far preferable to a life of ignominy and degradation based on compromising principles. How rightly Kavar Mchandra Singh Bedi has said:

جی کے مرنا تو سب کو آتا ہے مر کے جینا سکھا دیا تو نے

'Everybody knows that after life there is death; but it is you [O Ḥusayn] who has taught how to live by dying.'

As Thomas Carlyle, in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, has put it: 'The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husayn and his followers were rigid believers in God: they illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husayn, despite his minority, marvels me.'

On the plains of Karbalā', Ḥusayn showed what *jihād* stands for in Islamic terminology. He taught us, as no one else could have done,

that it does not mean aggrandisement or the flamboyant display of valour which cries out: 'One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name.' He showed, as none else could have done, that to remain firm and steadfast in the hour of trial and tribulation, to surrender to the will of Allah with complete resignation is the zenith of martyrdom and *jihād*. He showed us that even the death and destruction of his dearest ones cannot deter a person from the performance of the appointed task, from the fulfillment of the ordained purpose, without the least hesitation, without the least demur, without a word or murmur of complaint. Who else but Ḥusayn could have prayed to Allah for the salvation of Muslims without any rancour or bitterness under the dagger of the assassin. And all this with the utmost serenity and calm which comes from supreme resignation to the will of Allah and complete submission to His divine purpose. As Yagana says,

ڈوب کر پار اتر گیا اسلام آپ کیا جانیں کربلا کیا ہے

Only after drowning did Islam survive. How is it possible for anyone to comprehend the meaning, message, and significance of Karbalā?

Secretary to the Muhammadi Trust.

I

THE LIFE OF THE IMAM ḤUSAYN AS DEPICTED IN MUSLIM LITERATURE

RŪMĪ'S VIEW OF THE IMAM ḤUSAYN

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The martyrdom of the Imam Ḥusayn can hardly be called a major theme of Rūmī's works; in over 50,000 couplets he refers to it less than twenty times. Nevertheless, these few lines are sufficient to suggest how the events of Karbalā' were viewed not only by Rūmī, this great representative of the Ṣūfī tradition, but also by his listeners, who constituted a pious cross-section of Islamic society.

The first thing one notes is that it was sufficient for Rūmī to mention one of three words to conjure up the image of Ḥusayn's martyrdom for his listeners: Ḥusayn, Karbalā', 'Āshūrā', Yazīd and Shimr had a similar evocative power. There was no need for Rūmī to describe the tragedy to a Muslim public, since everyone was already familiar with it; even among Sunnis, it must have been part of the Islamic lore that was commonly called upon — especially in the context of popular preaching — to drive home points about good and evil, martyrdom, injustice, and similar themes. There is, of course, nothing surprising in this; scholars have often remarked on the indelible imprint left in the Muslim awareness by the Imam Ḥusayn's martyrdom. What should perhaps be noted is that the name Ḥusayn, along with the other words mentioned above, functioned to call up a whole set of images, just as, for example, it is sufficient for Rūmī to mention the name Abraham for his listeners to think of Nimrod and the fire that turned into a rosegarden; numerous other examples could also be cited.

One might ask about the sources of Rūmī's information concerning Ḥusayn, but this would be like asking where he learned about Islam. Nevertheless, one can say that among Ṣūfī poets that were known to have been read by Rūmī, Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131) employs the terms Ḥusayn and Karbalā' as poetic images in much the same manner that Rūmī does, while 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221) apparently does not refer to him except in the

context of panegyrics on the Prophet and the first few caliphs (e.g., in his *Moṣībat-nāma*).

Sanā'ī invokes the name of the Imam Ḥusayn either to stress the necessity of suffering and tribulation in the practice of one's religion,¹ or to point out that the saints — the men of God — are those who have experienced the death of their individual selves.² In one instance he compares Ḥusayn, Yazīd, and Shimr to contrary forces working within

1 For example:

Until they turn away from happiness,
men of purity will not be able to step onto Muṣṭafā's carpet.
How should there be joy in religion's lane when,
for the sake of empire, blood ran down Ḥusayn's throat at Karbalā'?

For the sake of a single 'Yes'
spoken by the spirit in eternily-without-beginning (7:172),
The men of Yes (bala) must submit themselves to affliction (balā')
until eternity-without-end.
[*Dīwān*, ed. Mudarris Raḍawī (Tehran, 1341/1962), pp. 40-41.]

Once you set out in this way,
your only provision will be annihilation,
even if you are an Abū Dharr or a Salmān.
If you are Ḥusayn,
you will see naught of the beauty of the bride's face
but daggers and arrows.
[*Dīwān*, p. 97]

This world is full of martyrs,
but where is a martyr like Ḥusay at Karbalā'?

2 For example:

Lift up your head in the garden of Verification,
so that in religion's lane you may see alive, group by group,
those who have been killed.
In one row you will see those killed with a blade like Ḥusayn,
in another those stricken with poison like Ḥasan.
[*Dīwān*, p. 485.]

Sanā'ī, since you have not been cut off from your own self,
how can you tell tales of Ḥusayn?
[*Dīwān*, p. 552.]

the souls of men,³ and here, as in the first two instances, parallels are found in Rūmī's poetry.

For Rūmī, love for God is the heart and soul of Islam.⁴ Certainly the 'forms' (*ṣūrat*) of our acts and religious practices are important, but they are given values by the 'meanings' (*ma'nā*) which animate them. Thus, for example, when asked if anything is more important for Islamic practice than the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), Rūmī replies that the animating spirit (*jān*) of the prayer is better, just as faith (*īmān*) is more excellent. Faith must be continuous, whereas the prayer is performed at five different times during the day. The prayer can be omitted for a valid excuse, but faith can never be omitted. Faith without prayer has certain benefits, whereas prayer without faith is hypocritical and useless. Finally, faith is the same in all religions, while the form of prayer in each is different.⁵

Were Rūmī to be asked this question in more general terms, i.e., 'Is anything more important than the religion of Islam itself?', I think he would answer that love for God is so, since all these outward forms of ritual and devotion, all the teachings and practices that make up Islam, exist for the sake of that love. This is not to suggest that the 'forms' are without importance — far from it; the 'meaning' — love — cannot exist without its outward supports. But one must not fall into the error of thinking that the doctrines, practices, and outward forms are their own *raison d'être*, for 'prayer without faith is useless'. As Rūmī remarks:

If the exposition of meanings were sufficient,
the creation of the world would be vain and useless.

If love for God were only thought and meaning,

3 Religion is your Ḥusayn,
while desires and hopes are pigs and dogs—
yet you kill the first through thirst and feed these two.
How can you keep on cursing the wicked Yazīd and Shimr?
You are a Shimr and a Yazīd for your own Husayn!

[*Dīwān*, p. 655.]

4 See W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī* (Albany N.Y., 1983), esp. pp. 194ff.

5 *Fīhi mā fīhi*, ed. B. Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 11, 32; cf. A. J. Arberry (trans.), *Discourses of Rūmī* (London, 1961), pp. 24-43.

the form of fasting and prayer would not exist.
The gifts that lovers exchange
are naught in relation to love except forms,
So that the gifts may give witness to the love hidden within.⁶

The forms of religion, then, are the necessary concomitants of the meaning of religion, which, for Rūmī, is love:

My religion is to live through love—
life through this spirit and body is my shame.⁷

The distinguishing feature of Rūmī's 'Religion of Love' is that it negates the reality of 'everything other than God' (*aghyār*) with the sword of the *shahāda*: 'There is no god but God.'

The joy and heartache of the lovers is He,
the wages and salary for their service He.
Were aught to be contemplated other than the Beloved,
how would that be Love? That would be idle infatuation.
Love is that flame which, when it blazes up,
burns away everything except the Beloved.
It drives home the sword of 'no god'
in order to slay other than God.
Consider carefully: after 'no god', what remains?
There remains 'but God'; the rest has gone.
Bravo, oh great, idol-burning Love!⁸

The chief 'idol' or 'other' that must be negated on the Path of Love is the seeker's own self: 'The mother of all idols is your own ego.'⁹

You are God's lover, and God is such that when He comes,
not a single hair of you will remain.
Before His glance a hundred like you are annihilated.

⁶ *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. R. J. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London, 1925-40), Bk I, vss. 2624-27
(all translations are my own).

⁷ *Mathnawī*, VI, 4059.

⁸ *Idem*, V, 586-590.

⁹ *Idem*, 1,772.

Is it that you are in love with your own negation, sir?
You are a shadow in love with the sun.
The sun conies, and the shadow is quickly naughted.¹⁰

The first attribute of the true lover, then, is that he must be ready to sacrifice himself for God.

O Love, pass the bitter judgement!
Cut me off from other than Thyself!
O torrent, you are roaring.
Roar! You take me to the Ocean.¹¹

But most men fear the torrent and flee the sword. They refuse to enter into the way of self-sacrifice, even though they are promised every manner of joy and felicity. Their faith is not strong enough to allow them to surrender their own wills and existences to God. Total readiness for martyrdom is the first quality of God's lover.

What does it mean to be Love's familiar?
Only to separate oneself from the heart's desire,
To become blood, to swallow down one's own blood,
and to wait at fidelity's door with the dogs.
The lover sacrifices himself—
for him death and removal are no different from staying.
On your way, O Moslem!
Be shielded by safety and strive at your piety,
For these martyrs have no patience without death—
they are in love with their own annihilation.
Flee if you want from affliction and fate—
their fear is to be without affliction.
Perform the fast on the recommended days and on 'Āshūrā'—
you cannot go to Karbalā'¹²

To be a human being in the true sense means to undertake the struggle against one's own ego.

¹⁰ *Idem*, 111, 4621-23.

¹¹ *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr*, ed. B. Furūzānfar, 10 vols. (Tehran, 1336-46/1957-67), v. 35823.

¹² *Idem*, ghazal no. 2102.

The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual combat. The first spiritual combat they undertake in their quest is the killing of the ego and the abandonment of personal wishes and sensual desires. This is the Greater Holy War (*jihād-i akbar*).¹³

If Ḥusayn is a model worthy to be emulated, it is not because he was killed by villains — this goes without saying. What is truly noteworthy about his life was his victory in the Greater Holy War; only by virtue of his spiritual greatness do the events that led to his physical martyrdom have meaning. The emulation of him that is encumbent upon his followers is then engagement in the Greater Holy War.

Why do you sit there with your own thoughts?
If you are a man, go to the Beloved!
Do not say, 'Perhaps He does not want me.'
What business has a thirsty man with such words?
Does the moth think about the flames?
For Love's spirit, thinking is a disgrace.
When the warrior hears the sound of the drum,
at once he is worth ten thousand men!
You have heard the drum, so draw your sword without delay!
Your spirit is the sheath of the all-conquering *Dhu'l-Faqār*!
You are Ḥusayn at Karbalā', think not of water!
The only 'water' you will see today is a sword of the first water!¹⁴

But in order to attain the Kingdom of Love a man must first suffer the pain of separation from his Beloved. For the more he understands the nature of his goal, the more he will understand the depth of his own inadequacy.

Whoever is more awake has greater pain,
whoever is more aware has a yellower face.¹⁵

¹³ *Fīhi mā fīhi*, p. 130; *Discourses*, pp. 140-41.

¹⁴ *Kullīyyāt*, vss. 3656-62.

¹⁵ *Mathnawī*, I, 629,

Nevertheless, the pain that the lover suffers always attracts him toward the object of his love.

Every heartache and suffering that enters your body and heart
pulls you by the ear to the Promised Abode.¹⁶

The reason for this is clear:

Your inward nature is full of dust from the veil of 'I-ness',
and that dust will not leave you all at once.
With every cruelty and every blow,
it departs little by little from the heart's face,
sometimes in sleep and sometimes in wakefulness.¹⁷

Eventually the pain and suffering of love will lead to the death of the ego and rebirth in God.

Night died and came to life, for there is life after death:
O heartache, kill me! For I am Ḥusayn, you are Yazīd.¹⁸

Or again,

O Murtaḍā of Love! Shams al-Dīn of Tabrīz—look at me!
I am like Ḥusayn, sitting in my own blood,
or like Ḥasan, drinking down poison.¹⁹

Again:

Whoever has my fire wears my robe—
he has a wound like Ḥusayn, a cup like Ḥasan.²⁰

In short, it is only through the suffering and tribulation of the spiritual journey as exemplified in the outward world by the trials of the Imam Ḥusayn and his family that man can attain the perfection for which he was created. Then, however, he has every right to speak of the joy and

¹⁶ *Kullīyyāt*, vs. 35487.

¹⁷ *Idem*, vss. 12078-79.

¹⁸ *Idem*, vs. 9206.

¹⁹ *Idem*, vs. 20517.

²⁰ *Idem*, vs. 6358.

felicity of union with God. If Rūmī, in one passage of the *Mathnawī* (VI 777-805), is able to poke fun at the Shī'a of Aleppo for their celebration of 'Āshūrā',²¹ it is precisely because here he is looking at the good news of joy and union which are announced by the Imam's spiritual victory and which are the meaning beyond the form of his outward suffering:

The spirit of a sultan has escaped from a prison.
Why should we tear our clothes and bite our fingers?
Since he was the king of religion,
his breaking of the bonds was a time of joy,

21 On the day 'Āshūrā'
all the people of Aleppo gather at the Antioch gate
until nightfall.
Men and women—
a great congregation—
mourn the family of the Prophet.
On 'Āshūrā'
the Shī'a wail and lament
with tears for Karbalā'....
A stranger, a poet,
arrived at Aleppo on the day of 'Āshūrā'
and heard all that lamentation
He went along asking questions in his search:
'What is this sorrow?
For whom are you mourning?....'
Someone said to him,
'Hey, are you mad? Are you not a Shī'ite?
Are you an enemy of the Family?
'Don't you know that it is the day of 'Āshūrā',
a day of mourning
for a soul who was greater than a generation?....'
The poet replied,
'True, but where are the days of Yazīd?
When did this tragedy occur!
How long the news has taken to reach you here!
The eyes of the blind have seen that loss!
The ears of the deaf have heard that story!
Have you been asleep until now
that you have just begun to tear your clothes in mourning?
Then mourn for yourselves, oh sleepers,
for this heavy sleep of yours is a terrible death!
The spirit of a sultan....'

For he sped toward the pavilions of good fortune
and threw off his fetters and chains.²²

In conclusion, let me quote two more of Rūmī's ghazals, which can serve to summarize the Imam Husayn's significance as pictured in Rūmī's works:

Where are you, martyrs of God,
you who have sought affliction
on the plain of Karbala'?

Where are you, light-spirited lovers,
you who fly better
than the birds in the sky?

Where are you, kings of the heavens,
you who have found the door
that leads outside the circling spheres?

Where are you,
you who have been delivered from spirit and place?
Indeed, does anyone ask of the intellect, 'Where are you?'

Where are you,
you who have broken the door of the prison
and given freedom to the debtors?

Where are you,
you who have opened the door to the treasury,
you who possess the wealth of poverty?

For some time now all of you have been swimming
in that Ocean of which this world is but the foam.
The forms of the universe are but the Ocean's foam—
if you, oh listener, are a man of purity,
pass beyond these bubbles!

These words are but the picture of my heart's bubbling—
if you are one of us,
leave aside the picture and go to the heart.

Rise from the east, O Sun of Tabriz,
for you are the root
of the root

²² *Mathnawī*, VI, 797-99.

of the root of every radiance.²³

—

In the fire of its yearning, my heart keeps up its cries,
hoping that a welcoming call will come to it
from the cirection of union.
My heart is Ḥusayn and separation Yazīd—
my heart has been martyred two hundred times
in the desert of torment and affliction (*karb-o-balā*).
Outwardly made a martyr, in the unseen world it has gained
life—
in the eyes of the enemy it is a prisoner,
in the Void, a king.
Dwelling in the paradise of union with the Friend,
it has been delivered from the depths of hunger's prison
and freed from the cheap and the dear.
Were the root of its tree not well nourished in the Unseen,
why are the blossoms of its union open for all to see?
Silence! Speak from the cirection of your awareness.
For the Universal Intellect is asking you,
'Will you not understand?' (2:44, etc.).²⁴

²³ *Kulliyāt*, ghazal no. 2707.

²⁴ *Idem*, ghazal no. 230.