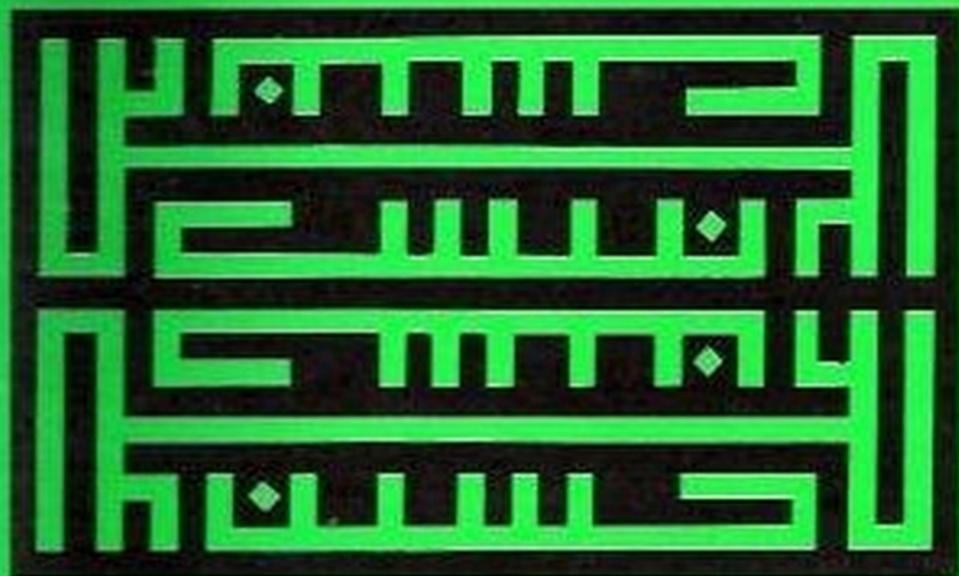


MAHWUDA YOUS

Redemptive Suffering in Islām

A Study of the Devotional Aspects of
'Āshūrā' in Twelver Shī'ism

MOLITEN



Redemptive Suffering in Islām

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MAHMOUD AYOUB
University of Toronto

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To the people of Iran

In grateful recognition of the inspiration I received during my stay in Mashhad from their devotion to the memory of the Martyr of Karbalā' and his family.

Preface

The present study is a revised version of a Ph.D. dissertation which I presented to the Faculty of Religious Studies of Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the spring of 1975. The initial work grew out of an idea for a comparative study of the concept of redemptive suffering in Christianity and Islām.

For over a millennium, the *Shīʿī* community has kept the memory of the death of the grandson of the Prophet, rehearsing and interiorizing its tragic details in ever-growing emotional intensity. Every year, during the first ten days of Muḥarram, the first month of the Islāmic calendar, groups of devotees gather together to lament the martyred *Imām* in heart-rending dirges, to recount the familiar tale of the drama of Karbalā' and to affirm their loyalty to its martyrs. The cult which has grown around this event of early Islāmic history has provided Islāmic piety with a unique expression of the phenomenon of redemption through the suffering and passion of a divine hero or holy martyr. The literature which this popular piety has produced is vast, highly emotional and even fantastic, especially to the modern western reader. To capture some of the spirit of this piety and its literature, I felt it necessary to speak its language and paint as faithful a picture as possible of its devotional and ritualistic character without losing sight of the rigorous demands of modern scholarship. The degree to which I have been able to achieve this goal was due in large measure to the help I have received from my professors and many friends and colleagues.

I am especially grateful to Professor Annemarie Schimmel, who was my thesis advisor, for kindly reading the various drafts of my work and offering many valuable suggestions and much needed encouragement. I would like to thank also Professors John B. Carman and Muhsin Mahdi for their interest in my work and supportive encouragement, and the Center for the Study of World Religions and the Middle East Center of Harvard University for the generous grants without which this study would not have been possible.

I am deeply grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. William A. Graham for his invaluable help in following the progress of this study, always ready to offer his sound advice and constructive criticism. To Dr. Wheeler M. Thackston I owe many thanks for his assistance, and to my friend 'Abd al-Karīm Crow for his careful work in typing the final draft. I am also grateful to my wife Lynda Clarke for her patient and meticulous care in helping correct and edit the final draft of this work, correcting the proofs and preparing the index.

The publication of this work has been made possible by a generous grant from friends who wish to remain anonymous. Their generosity has also provided the funds for much needed technical work in editing and revising the text in preparation for publication. I am forever indebted to my esteemed professor Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith for his kindness and guidance throughout my years of study at the Center for the Study of World Religions. To him I owe the appreciation for my own religious tradition and whatever sensitivity I have for the study of man's religiousness in general. His clear and incisive thinking has helped me greatly in formulating my own ideas and approach to the present investigation. The responsibility for all the inadequacies and shortcomings of this study is mine alone.

Toronto, 1978

Mahmoud Ayoub

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Transliteration and Abbreviations

1. TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration of Arabic into English in the present work follows in general the method of the Library of Congress as outlined in the *Cataloguing Service Bulletin* 49 (November 1958).

2. ABBREVIATIONS

Complete bibliographical information for the works listed below can be found in the Bibliography.

- EI*² *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (1960–)
- SEI* Gibb, H. A. R. and Kramers, J. H., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*
- GAL* Brockelmann, Karl, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* (2nd revised edition)
- GAL(S)* Brockelmann, Karl, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur: Supplement*
- GAS* Sezgin, Fuat, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftums*, Vol. I

Introduction

Islām has no clearly defined doctrine of redemption. Yet redemption plays a vital role in the actual life of the Muslim community and has been a dynamic force through the acceptance and understanding of suffering. Purposeful suffering is the holy struggle (*jihād*) of man in the way of God. This is so regarded both at the personal level and at the social level, where personal suffering could be meaningful for the society and its religious life through history. This idea has its definite roots in the Qur'ān¹ and continued to play an important role in later Islāmic piety, especially in Sufism.

It is with the meaning of the suffering and martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn, grandson of the Prophet and spiritual head of the *Shī'ī* community, that this study will be concerned. His martyrdom has been seen by *Shī'īs* as necessary to the fulfillment of his role as *imām*; without it he could not have become the paradigm of selfless sacrifice, the measure of truth and falsehood, nor the intercessor on the Day of Judgment for his followers. The question to be investigated is in what way his martyrdom has been regarded as redemptive. The investigation will deal with representative classical and medieval devotional materials, beginning with the earliest available sources from the fourth century A.H., and ending with the writings of the ninth century A.H., just prior to the consolidation of *Shī'ī* Islām as the state religion of Iran under the Safavids.

It is our thesis in this study that all suffering can be in some way redemptive. More particularly, (the suffering of *Imām* Ḥusayn has been taken by the *Shī'ī* community to be a source of salvation through the interiorization and emulation of that suffering by the community) and through the high favor of the *Imām* as an intercessor. This intercession is the direct reward of the sufferings of the entire family of the Prophet, and of Ḥusayn especially, as his status could be attained only through martyrdom. Redemption in *Shī'ī* piety must be understood within the context of intercession. It will be seen that according to *Shī'ī*

thought, all the *imāms* have shared in this suffering. Consequently, they will also share in the divine gift of intercession. Finally, we would like to submit that redemption, in whatever way it is understood, includes both salvation and judgement: salvation for the elect of mankind and judgement for their enemies.

This study will investigate the life and place of *Imām Ḥusayn* in the history of the devotion, hopes and piety of the *Ithnā'asharī Shī'ah*. Our purpose will not be to document the historicity of any particular event in his life, nor to investigate the authenticity of anything that he may have said. These are the tasks for historians of the origins of *Shī'ī Islām*. Our intent is rather to look at his life from the point of view of popular devotion and to deal primarily with the community's understanding of his life. Thus, we will attempt to study the legends, hagiographical writings, popular poetry, and similar devotional literature of *ta'zīyah* and *zīyārah*. *Ta'zīyah* consists of memorial services (*majālis*) held in the month of Muḥarram or at any time of year in which popular poetry in the form of elegies (*marāthī*) plays an important part. *Ziyārah* is pilgrimage, actual or symbolic, to Ḥusayn's shrine, and the literature associated with it. Both of these genres of pietistic literature, and especially the second, represent liturgical devotions that can be performed in their special seasons or at other times of the year both for the memory that they revive in the hearts of the people and for the blessing (*barakah*) that they provide.

The study itself will be divided into six chapters structured around certain key terms or concepts from the literature itself. In Chapter 1, entitled 'The House of Sorrows (*bayt al-aḥzān*)', we shall consider the value of suffering in general and specifically the sufferings of the Holy Family of the Prophet. This and the following chapters will, in a way, set the stage for what follows. The 'House of Sorrows' represents in *Shī'ī* piety the community of suffering, which is basically the twelve *imāms*, the Prophet and his daughter. Into this community, the pious devotees of the *imāms* can enter through their participation in the suffering of the Holy Family. Of special significance for *Shī'ī* piety is the suffering and death of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (the radiant) who, through her suffering, death and final exaltation, has represented for the *Shī'ī* community both its disappointments and hopes. Thus, a special section will be devoted to her. The House of Sorrows is

moreover the community of suffering to which, in some way, all the earlier prophets belong. Indeed, it spans the entire creation from the beginnings of human history to its final eschatological consummation on the Day of Judgment. We shall, therefore, consider briefly the role of earlier prophets in that cosmic drama.

The *imāms* are regarded by *Shī'ī* piety not simply as a persecuted group of people, but rather as people whose mere existence is necessary for the creation and subsistence of the world. It is, therefore, important, before we discuss the special status of Ḥusayn the martyr in *Shī'ī* piety, to look at the *Shī'ī* doctrine of the *imām* and, more specifically, the role which the *imāms* have played in creation and the history of mankind. This chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the *imāms*; their creation, the substance of which they are supposed to be made, and the role they play in the history of human salvation and judgment.

The first two chapters will be an introduction to what follows in this study. Thus, Chapter 3 will deal with *Imām* Ḥusayn; his birth, childhood and his later years, just before the events leading to his martyrdom. It will be seen that at every step from his birth onward, his impending death was anticipated and his status as the great martyr emphasized. Ḥusayn is seen by *Shī'ī* piety as the paragon of wisdom and courage and of piety and generosity. Some of these ideas will be dealt with, and more examples of his wisdom, eloquence and piety will be given in the appendix (Appendix B) to this chapter.

The sufferings of the Holy Family, the special status of the *imām* and the early life of *Imām* Ḥusayn may be seen as a prelude or background to the event of Karbalā'. Thus, Chapter 4 will deal at considerable length with the *Shī'ī* understanding of Ḥusayn's martyrdom. We shall first examine the earliest interpretations of this event as seen by historians of Islām such as Ṭabarī and the *Shī'ī* writers of early biographies of the *imāms* such as Shaykh al-Mufid; then we shall consider the later developments. Again our concern will be not with the historical events alone, but more with the way these events were interiorized by the community and made the focal point of their understanding of history.

Chapters 5 and 6 will continue this same theme by showing how the community directly relates to the event of Karbalā', and through it to the life and mission of the *imāms*. First we shall consider in Chapter 5

the idea of the reward (*thawāb*) for weeping for the sufferings of the *imāms*, particularly for *Imām Ḥusayn*, and the special *thawāb* for composing and reciting poetry in his memory. Secondly, we shall analyze some of the major themes of this poetry and give examples when necessary. This genre of poetry is known as *marāthī* (elegies), and constitutes part of the *ta'zīyah majālis*, or memorial services, held in honor of *Ḥusayn's* martyrdom. A typical *majlis* (memorial service) will be described, relying both on written sources and on personal experience. Perhaps the most unique feature of the pietistic celebration of *Ḥusayn's* martyrdom is the *zīyārah* ritual. Through this ritual the pact of loyalty of the devotees with the Holy Family is continually renewed and the *imāms'* prerogative of intercession and redemption is expressed. The *zīyārah* ritual could be part of the *ta'zīyah* celebration or it could be an independent devotional act of covenant renewal. The *zīyārah* looks forward to the eschatological consummation of the drama of *Karbalā'*.

Chapter 6 will deal specifically with *Shī'ī* eschatology. First we shall examine the intercessory role of the Prophet and the *imāms* through the concept of the *ḥawḍ al-kawthar* (a large pool or basin). The community through its participation in the sufferings of the *Imām* shares in the *Imām's* role of intercession and redemption as well. This relation of the devotees with the *imāms* will be our second point of investigation. *Fāṭimah*, who is seen as the mistress of the House of Sorrows both in this world and in the world to come, will be also the mistress of the Day of Judgment. Her sufferings as described in Chapter 1 will be finally rewarded and her vindication will be the vindication of her devotees and the judgment of her enemies.

The *imāms* in their earthly careers have often presented a picture of dismal failure or quiet assent to the rule of those whom they considered usurpers of their own power. This apparent failure of the *imāms* can be seen also as the failure of their community. Thus, their hopes and the hopes of their devotees are dramatically expressed in the violent career of the *Mahdī*, the final avenger. The *Mahdī* is the twelfth *Imām* whose return after a long period of occultation is expected by the community. He will avenge the blood and wrongs of all those who were martyred or persecuted in the way of God from the beginning of the world. In this great mission of the descendant of *Ḥusayn*, the

Prophet as well as the first three *imāms* will participate. The return of the *Mahdī*, therefore, will provide the natural conclusion of this long cosmic drama.

The death of Ḥusayn, however, has meant different things at different periods for the Muslim community. Nor was the significance of this event limited to the *Shīʿī* followers of the *imāms*. We shall conclude this study, therefore, by briefly relating this fascinating phenomenon in *Shīʿī* Islām to its similar phenomena in other religious traditions. In whatever way the death of Ḥusayn has been understood, it has not lost its aspect of redemption. Redemption may be seen as direct intercession or direct example. In the second case it redeems, so to speak, the community and its ideal by continuing to provide a living example of self-sacrifice.

The death of Ḥusayn and the movement which grew around it could be studied as a political movement. As will be seen, the Muḥarrām *cultus* has provided the Muslim world, and especially the *Shīʿī* community, with one of the most dynamic forces in its long history. As expressed in the language of myth and folk piety, it has judged and consoled men and women in every age and place in the world of Islām. We have consciously endeavored in this work to preserve the language and idiom of the literature of the 'Āshūrā' devotion, and whenever possible have let the sources speak for themselves.

METHOD, SCOPE AND SOURCES

The themes discussed in the outline above represent a long historical development. The method of investigation employed in this study is to trace this development, examining the relevant concepts and devotional practices up to the ninth century A.H. (fifteenth century A.D.). This will be done through a study of representative sources from the fourth to the ninth centuries A.H.

There is very little written about the subject earlier than the late third and early fourth centuries A.H. Although these early sources relate traditions that go back to the twelve *imāms* and certainly contain some authentic early materials, they must be seen as products of their age and its concerns. There are a few important elegies, said to have

been composed shortly after the death of Ḥusayn, which provide some idea of very early developments; these will have to be considered as well. It is, however, with the fourth century that this study really begins. •

The earliest available source that touches on our subject is the important *ḥadīth* collection of Muḥammad Ya'qūb Ibn Ishāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī² (d. 328/939) which is entitled *al-Kāfī*. One section of this book, *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah*, deals specifically with the concept of the imamate and the lives of the *imāms*. Although the traditions here that are directly relevant to our investigation are relatively few, nonetheless they present some of the earliest concepts that were to shape the *Shī'ī* pietistic cult of Ḥusayn and his martyrdom. Also important are the writings of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummi³ (d. 381/991). His book *al-Amālī aw al-Majālis*⁴ has some very important traditions that indicate a very early development of many of the notions and practices with which this study is concerned. Other writings by this man are also important and will be used. Another important early source is *al-Irshād* by Shaykh al-Mufid⁵ (d. 413/1022). His book is an important source for the biographies of the *imāms*, and many later writers use him as a primary source of information.

Of the general historical works that will be used in this book, the most important is that of Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī⁶ (d. 310/923). He used as his source a lost martyrdom narrative, the *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn* of Abū Mikhnaf⁷ (d. 157/774). His work is an important source not just for the actual historical events of the life of *Imām* Ḥusayn, but for the popular understanding of them as well. Two important early historians, al-Ya'qūbi⁸ (d. 284/897) and al-Mas'ūdī⁹ (d. 345/956), were *Shī'īs* themselves, and their works, especially Mas'ūdī's *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, reflect the devotional *Shī'ī* attitude of their time. The authenticity of this work is, however, doubted by some modern scholars.¹⁰

Another important genre is that of the martyrdom narratives, or *maqātil*, which have remained so popular that they are still being written today. The earliest of these is the *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn* of Abū Mikhnaf mentioned above. The *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyyīn* of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī¹¹ (d. 365/967) presents some very early and somewhat sober accounts of the martyrdom of Karbalā' and the events leading to

it. Another important later *maqtal* is *al-Luhūf* by Ibn Ṭāwūs¹² (d. 664/1266). The author himself was an important figure in *Shīʿī* religious thought and in his book he preserves many early traditions relating to the significance of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and his *zīyārah*. Ibn Namā al-Ḥillī¹³ (d. 650/1252) was a very well known jurist and religious thinker. He claims that his work *Muthīr al-Aḥzān* is a careful selection from the many traditions for devotional use during the days of Muḥarram, and as such it contains much that is valuable for our purposes. One century earlier another important *maqtal* was produced by al-Khawārizmī¹⁴ (d. 568/1172), who was a student of the famous al-Zamakhsharī. This is a book preserving numerous traditions on the life and virtues of the Prophet and his family. The author was a reliable traditionist and provides complete chains of authorities for his material. It is also significant that al-Khawārizmī himself was not a *Shīʿī* Muslim, yet his language and idiom come very close to the traditional *Shīʿī* approach.

The final type of material to be considered is that relating to *taʿzīyah* and *zīyārah*, which may generally be described as hagiographical literature. The *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* by Ibn Shahrāshūb¹⁵ (d. 588/1192) relates the life of the twelve *imāms*, preserving all the hagiographical traditions up to his time. This book also contains many elegies as well as *zīyārah* traditions. An even earlier work of the same genre is *Dalāʾil al-Imāmah* by Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī¹⁶ (d. first quarter of the fourteenth century A.H.). A similar work is *al-Muntakhab* by al-Ṭurayḥī al-Fakhrī (d. 1085/1674). Although this is a late work, still it preserves much that is traditional. Its main value is that it is a collection of *marāthī* and sermons prepared specifically for use during the first ten days of Muḥarram. This book, therefore, is an actual *taʿzīyah majālis* collection. The *Bihār al-Anwār* of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī¹⁷ (d. 1111/1699) is an important encyclopedic work. Again the author collected materials from ancient sources, many of which are no longer extant. Volume ten of this large work deals specifically with the life and martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn and devotional practices associated with it.¹⁸ The earliest and perhaps most important source on *zīyārah* proper is *Kāmil al-Zīyārāt* by Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Qawlawayh al-Qummī¹⁹ (d. 367/978). Also to be used in this study is a contemporary collection of *marāthī* (*ʿAdab al-Ṭaff*

aw *Shu'arā' al-Ḥusayn*) compiled by Jawād Shubbār. This is a chronological collection of *marāthī* from the first century A.H. to the present and is very complete.

Unfortunately, only one representative source of the traditional *maqātil* (martyrdom narrative) genre is available in a European language. This is the translation of some early *maqtal* materials (translated by F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1883) published under the title *Der Tod des Husein ben 'Ali und die Rache, ein historischen Roman aus dem Arabischen*. No other source dealing with the popular devotional aspects of the Muḥarram tragedy has, to my knowledge, been translated into a western language. I have seen several theses and other works in French, English and German dealing with the later passion play or *ta'ziyah* in Iran. These, however, deal with the period of the Safavids (sixteenth century) and later, which falls outside the scope of this work.

The House of Sorrows

*Bayt al-Aḥzān*¹

Human life has been marked by a great mystery, the mystery of suffering and death.² Human consciousness, from its earliest beginnings, has been a consciousness of suffering, of either actual physical pain or mental agony, or both together. The first steps towards civilization, the building of human society, may be seen as attempts to face suffering with all its anxieties, insecurities and pain, and to find some meaning in life in spite of it. These attempts could be characterized as the search for identity and permanence, and for meaning and value in an otherwise ephemeral and desperate existence.

The next great leap forward in human consciousness involves the realization that meaning and fulfillment in human life can be attained not in spite of, but through, suffering and even death. This quest for the redemption of man, and, indeed, of the totality of phenomenal existence, is the essence of faith. Faith, to be sure, is a divine gift of grace to man; yet man's acceptance of it, working out in his life its implications and demands, is what we mean by the *quest of faith*. This search for meaning in the most meaningless aspects of life has dominated myth and ritual, spiritual quests and cultural achievements since the dawn of recorded history. Considered from the point of view of the history of religion, this process becomes the history of revelation, or of divine providence at work in human history, shaping and guiding its course toward final fulfillment in God.

Redemption is used here in its broadest sense to mean the healing of existence or the fulfillment of human life. Thus the meaning of redemption in this instance must be distinguished from redemption as a theological concept, and especially from its technical use in Christian theology. This fulfillment through suffering is what this study will call *redemption*. The basic assumption is that all suffering can, in some sense, be regarded as redemptive where faith is present; the faith which gives hope against despair and fulfillment against the annihilation of death. It is the faith which cries out in the words of the Psalmist, 'Even

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me.³ It is the hope proclaimed in the words of the Master: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.'⁴ It is the fulfillment affirmed in spite of death, by those men of faith who ' . . . when visited by calamity . . . say "to God do we belong, and to him we shall return" ' .⁵

Suffering, whatever its cause and nature may be, must be regarded as an evil power of negation and destruction. It is non-being, the opposite of the Good which is Being in all its fullness. Suffering, or non-being, cannot itself be destroyed, but it can and must be transformed. This transformation of suffering from a power of total negation into something of value is effected through human faith and divine mercy. Thus transformed, suffering becomes the great teacher for the pious, their road to salvation. The redemptive power of suffering lies in the fact that suffering can be overcome only by its own power. This is movingly stated in the Christian liturgical hymn which triumphantly proclaims that 'Christ rose from the dead trampling death by death and giving life to those in the tomb.'⁶

In this chapter we shall first consider the question of suffering in general and its meritorious aspects according to Islāmic traditions (*ḥadīth*). It will be seen that suffering is proportionate to man's piety and status with God. Thus prophets have the greater share of afflictions, and as we shall see below their sufferings are purposeful in that they provide an example for the pious and a test of their own faith and endurance. Secondly, in order to fully understand the profound meaning of the suffering of the Holy Family for *Shī'ī* devotees, we shall take a brief look at the depiction of the sufferings of the Holy Family in the participatory sufferings of earlier prophets.

Thirdly, we shall consider the sufferings and privations of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family, specifically as portrayed in hagiographical sources and commemorated by *Shī'ī* Muslims. The sufferings of the Holy Family are seen by the *Shī'ī* community as the culmination of all suffering of the pious from the beginning of human history until its final consummation.

Since Fāṭimah, the daughter of Muḥammad, epitomizes the quiet suffering of a pious and weak woman for Islāmic piety in general and *Shī'ī* piety in particular, we shall consider her case in some detail. She is

considered the mistress *par excellence* of the House of Sorrows. As she endured the greatest sufferings here on earth, she will, on the Day of Resurrection, enjoy great rewards and total vindication. Her vindication, moreover, will include the vindication of the Holy Family and the entire community.

The purpose of this chapter will be to put in its proper context the sufferings of *Imām Ḥusayn* as understood and interiorized by the *Shīʿī* community. This study is an investigation of a long drama of suffering looking back to the time before creation and forward to the end of human history. Our discussion in this chapter will provide the central core of this drama.

1.1 THE MERIT OF SUFFERING FOR THE PIOUS

For the people of God, this world is a world of suffering and sorrow; it is indeed the House of Sorrows. This idea has been expressed with strong emphasis in the Islāmic tradition, in spite of an equally strong stress on all the good things that this world offers for man gratefully to accept and enjoy. As the *ḥadīths* (discussed below) will demonstrate, the man of faith will be visited with suffering and calamity in accordance with the strength and durability of his faith. His patient endurance will be accordingly rewarded. When Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ asked, 'O Apostle of God, who among men are those afflicted with the greatest calamity?', the Prophet replied:

The prophets, then the pious, everyone according to the degree of his piety. A man is afflicted according to his faith (*dīn*); if his faith is durable, his affliction is accordingly increased, and if his faith is weak [literally, *thin*], his affliction is made lighter. Afflictions continue to oppress the worshipful servant (*ʿabd*) until they leave him walking on the face of the earth without any sin cleaving to him.⁷

Another companion, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, came to visit the Prophet, who was suffering from such a high fever his visitor could feel it burn through his covers, 'O Apostle of God, how strong this fever is in you!', he said. The Prophet answered, 'Yes, so it is. Our afflictions are multiplied in order that our rewards may also be multiplied.' When

the visitor asked, 'Who are the most afflicted of men?', the Prophet gave him the same answer and continued, ' . . . the pious man is so afflicted with poverty that he finds no mantle to cover him. Yet he would rejoice with affliction as you would with comfort and ease.'⁸

Calamity and sorrow are not the lot of the individual only. The House of Sorrows is shared as an earthly abode by all the children of God. It is their place of trials and means of showing their love for Him. The Prophet said,

The greatness of the reward [of the man of faith] is proportionate with the greatness of his afflictions. For, if God loves a people, He visits them with afflictions. He who is content [that is, with God's will], with him will God be pleased, and he who is wrathful, divine wrath will he have.⁹

Feeling contentment (*riḍā*) with the divine will, the pious hope for His mercy and conform to His will. Thus, the trials of affliction are more than a mere discipline; they are an active choice made independently of rewards and punishments. The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, relates a tradition from the *Book of 'Alī*¹⁰ essentially similar to the first tradition cited in this section, but he adds, ' . . . for, God [exalted be His Majesty] made this world as neither a reward for the believer nor punishment for the unbeliever. Truly affliction is nearer to the pious man of faith than is the fallen rain to the earth.'¹¹ Here we see one way to overcome suffering: by regarding it as something positive, the necessary training or discipline for the people of God and the final test of their faith.

The House of Sorrows becomes the abode of the 'soul content in God'.¹² The House of Sorrows is older than creation itself, and it shall remain until the last day when all sorrow and suffering shall be no more and the soul that was content during its sojourn in this vale of tears will enter into final bliss in the paradise of God.¹³ The House of Sorrows encompasses not only all human history, but the cosmos in its totality as well: the heavens and the earth and all that exists. The cosmic notion that all things, present, past and future, suffer with and for the Holy Family will be emphasized often throughout this study.

1.2 THE PARTICIPATION OF ANCIENT PROPHETS IN THE SUFFERING OF THE HOLY FAMILY

The family or household (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet Muḥammad occupies a central place in *Shī'ī* piety. Their suffering and sorrows are in turn intensely concentrated in the sufferings of one man, 'the wronged martyr', *Imām* Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. Indeed, all sufferings before are but a prelude to his, the final act in a long drama of tribulation. He is the seal of the martyrs and their chief. All suffering and martyrdom after him are only modes of participation in his martyrdom. The Jewish *savant* (chief of the rabbis) Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who embraced Islām during the caliphate of the second Caliph, 'Umar, is said to have declared:

The greatest *Malḥamah* (tragic episode) is that one which will never be forgotten. It is the corruption (*fasād*) which God mentioned in the Books [scriptures] and in your book [the Qur'ān] saying, 'Corruption has appeared on the land and in the sea.' This corruption opened with the martyrdom of Hābīl (Abel) and will close with the martyrdom of Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī.¹⁴

Before Karbalā', from Adam onward, the prophets are said to have participated in the sorrows of Muḥammad and his vicegerents, and especially in the martyrdom of his grandson, Ḥusayn, in two ways. Each was told of it, and thus shared in the grief of the Holy Family; and in a small way, directly or indirectly, each tasted some of the pain or sorrow that is associated with the sacred spot of Karbalā'.

Adam, the father of humanity, was the first to know of the people of the House of Sorrows and to participate in their grief. Their names were the 'words' (*kalimāt*) that he received from his Lord, '... and He turned towards him'.¹⁵ When Adam disobeyed the divine command, and was consequently expelled from paradise, the angel Gabriel came down and taught him to pray thus:

Say, O Thou who art praised (*ḥamīd*), for the sake of Muḥammad; O Thou who art most high (*alī*), for the sake of 'Alī, O Thou who alone art the Creator (*fāṭir*), for the sake of Fāṭimah; O Thou who art alone the Bountiful (*muḥsin*), for the sake of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and from Thee comes all the bounty (*iḥsān*), turn Thy face towards me.¹⁶

When Adam mentioned the name of Ḥusayn, his heart sank and his tears flowed. He asked the angel why and was told,

Your son Ḥusayn will be afflicted with a calamity (*muṣībah*) beside which all calamities will appear insignificant. He shall be killed thirsty, a stranger and one utterly abandoned, having no supporter or help. If only you could see him when he will cry out, O Adam, 'O my thirst, O my abandonment!', then thirst will stand between him and heaven like a veil of smoke. His cries will be answered only by strikes of the sword and the cup of death. Then will he be slain like a lamb, from the back of the neck, and his enemies will pillage his goods. His head and those of his supporters will be paraded in the land, and with them his womenfolk carried captives. All this has pre-existed in the omniscience of the One, the All Giver (*mannān*).¹⁷

Hearing this, Adam wept bitterly like a mother grieving for her loved one.¹⁸

Adam is also depicted as actually sharing in the pain of the *Imām*. When he was expelled from the Garden with his wife Eve and left to roam the earth, he arrived in the spot of Karbalā'. There, without any apparent cause, his heart became oppressed with grief; he tripped over a stone, and blood gushed from his foot. He lifted his eyes to heaven and cried out, 'O my Lord, have I now committed yet another transgression for which Thou hast punished me thus? For I have roamed the whole earth and no adversity has befallen me as it did in this spot.' God sent to him the reply, 'O Adam, you have committed no transgression, but on this spot your son Ḥusayn will be wrongly killed, and thus your blood flowed in emulation of his blood.' Then Adam asked, 'Will Ḥusayn be a prophet?' The answer came back, 'No, but he will be the descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.' Adam asked who his murderer would be; he was told, '... Yazīd, the accursed of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth.' Adam continued, 'What must I do, O Gabriel?' 'Curse him, O Adam', the angel answered. So Adam cursed Yazīd four times. Then he walked on, seeking his wife Eve, and found her on Mount 'Arafāt.¹⁹

Sacred history belongs not to material or calendar time; rather it has its own logic which transcends our time and space. With Adam, the father of mankind, begins exoteric history within the sequence of time

and the realm of space. Yet Adam also enters esoteric history, the history that is not bound by time or space and moves within eternal time (*azal*), the time before time was. He enters through his participation in the sorrows and sufferings of the people who are the prime characters in that sacred history and whose sufferings, or earthly lives, are its focal points.

Many traditions assert that God created Muḥammad, 'Alī and their descendants before heaven and earth. A few of these traditions will be examined in the following chapter of this study; one of these, however, is immediately relevant. On the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd, the Prophet said:

. . . God created me, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, from the light of His holiness. When He wished to bring His creation into being, He split open (*fataqa*) my light and from it made the heavens and the earth and I, by God, am greater than the heavens and the earth. God then split open the light of 'Alī and from it made the throne (*'arsh*) and stool (*kursī*) and 'Alī, by God, is greater than the throne and the stool. He split open the light of Ḥasan and from it He created the black-eyed houris and the angels. Then God split open the light of Ḥusayn and from it He made the tablet (*lawḥ*) and the pen (*qalam*), and Ḥusayn is more exalted than the tablet and the pen.²⁰

It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that Ḥusayn is linked in this creation myth with the two items of destiny and revelation. The tablet is both the record of human destiny and the archetypal form of the Qur'ān; the pen moves of its own accord in this heavenly tablet to trace out the divine decrees of destiny. In a very direct and special way, Ḥusayn is connected with the history of creation and of mankind. He is also linked to the divine plan of the universe and through his martyrdom the destiny of men is determined. Human history revolves around him: first as the *Imām* and father of the *imāms*, and secondly through the mission of the *Mahdī* who will avenge Ḥusayn's blood and fulfill his mission.

Here we see that it was necessary for God to create the redeemer before the redeemed. It will be clear in the following chapter that the *imāms*, for whose sake all things were created, were themselves created

before all things. Through them, moreover, God predestined the final fulfillment of creation, as in the Logos Christology, where all that was made through Christ the Logos.²¹ Nor is the central act of the drama of redemption, that is, the martyrdom of the *Imām*, confined to profane time. Adam, as well as other prophets, we are told, saw the tragedy of Karbalā' in all its details.²² In fact, the words often used to describe the manner in which Adam saw the tragic event are *maththala lahu*,²³ that is, He (God) showed him the form of the event, rehearsed it for him, or had it acted out. The timelessness of a central event like this one, or the crucifixion of Christ, is a recurrent notion in the history of man's religion to which we shall return when we consider the eschatological aspects of the (*Āshūrā*) devotions, in Chapter 6.

The *imāms* enter into our history through their office as *imāms*, the inheritance of the prophets and their vicegerents (*awṣiyyā*') until the end of time. As we shall see in the following chapter, every prophet from Adam to Muḥammad had his *awṣiyyā*' who carried on his mission until the coming of the next major prophet. Thus for *Shī'ī* piety, the cycles of prophethood and imamate are intricately related and the latter is necessary for the completion of the former. The *imāms*, as it were, break into our history without being bound by it. As *imāms*, they belong in their essential being to metahistory, the history of salvation. We are told on the authority of the fifth *Imām*, Muḥammad al-Bāqir,

When the prophethood of Adam was consummated and his days were fulfilled, God said to him, 'O Adam, I have fulfilled your days and your prophetic mission has been completed. Render therefore the Knowledge (*ilm*) which you possess, the Faith (*imān*), and the Great Name [of God], the inheritance of Knowledge and the treasures of the prophetic sciences to your descendants beginning with your son, Seth, the gift of God.'²⁴

Prophets and vicegerents up to Muḥammad followed one another, God announcing to them and they telling one another of the coming of Muḥammad. Muḥammad was in turn commanded by God to bestow this primordial prophetic inheritance on his own family beginning with 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. For God continued, 'Verily I shall never let cease the Knowledge and Faith . . . from your progeny as I did not let

them cease in the households of the prophets who were between you and your father Adam.²⁵

Indeed, the *imāms* are identified with esoteric knowledge itself, evident in the assertion that the 'words' that Adam received from God were the names of the five sinless ones (*ma'sūmūn*). The fifth *Imām*, moreover, declared to one of his disciples, 'We are the knowledge of God and the treasurers of His revelations.'²⁶

In popular tradition, proclamation to a prophet of the coming *imāms* and especially of the tragedy of Karbalā' is always linked to the central event in the prophet's life. This is no more than a dramatic concretization of sacred esoteric tradition. In the case of Adam, it was linked first to the beginning of his prophetic knowledge, and then to the beginning of his earthly existence, after he had lost the paradisaical state of pristine innocence. Furthermore, by means of this revelation of the House of Sorrows and his place in it, Adam was restored to true humanity, the prophetic existence of the pure ones (*asfiyā'*) of God.

For the religious person every event or thing can be, symbolically or actually, a link with sacred time and space. This will to sacralize the world in its entirety, often unconscious, has led religious men and women throughout the ages to defy rational or even religious logic, sparing no object or event, no matter how trivial it may seem, from providing a symbol of the sacred. The examples of the participation of ancient prophets in the drama of Karbalā' are a clear instance of this process. In fact, the more fantastic a story is, the better it serves to provide free rein for popular pietistic imagination.

When Noah, the second major heir to the prophetic gift after Adam, was ordered to build the ark, the angel Gabriel brought him both the plan of the ark and the nails with which to construct it.²⁷ Five of these nails shone like the sun, and Noah found great joy and consolation in beholding four of them, but sorrow and despondency in the fifth. He asked the angel why, and was told that the nails symbolized the Prophet Muḥammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, his daughter Fāṭimah, the radiant one (*al-Zahrā'*), and their two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In his sorrow Noah unconsciously anticipated the great wrong (*ẓulm*) and calamity (*muṣībah*) that would befall the man symbolized by the fifth nail.

Noah's life is further linked with Ḥusayn. His ark floated smoothly

over the waters of the flood until suddenly, caught by the raging wind and waters, it began to sway violently. The occupants within thought that they were doomed to drowning as punishment for a sin they had committed of which they were not aware. Noah complained to God of this unexpected punishment and learned that the ark was passing over the land of Karbalā' where the grandson of the Seal of the Prophets, Ḥusayn, would be martyred at the hands of the most wicked men: for this reason the ark was troubled. Noah wept for the death of the *Imām* and cursed his murderers and the ark went safely on to its resting place on the mountain. This happened, we are told on the authority of the sixth *Imām*, on the day of 'Āshūrā'.²⁸ It is irrelevant that the ancient prophet, already told of Karbalā', needed a reminder; the aim of both stories is to link the event of Karbalā' to the flood. In this way all of history enters into sacred history by participating in its central event.

For Muslims, Abraham was the first major prophet of the second humanity, the humanity after the deluge. He was the father of the monotheistic faiths, an apostle with power, one of the *ulū al-'azm*,²⁹ and a friend of God: therefore he participates more directly and fully in the sorrows of the holy household (*ahl al-bayt*). In his case, popular and sacred traditions merge as he presents too close an analogy with the sacred drama of martyrdom to allow much room for hagiography. Yet we are told that he was shown all the kingdoms of the earth³⁰ and that beneath the throne of majesty he saw the five holy ones as forms of light praising and extolling God.³¹ He was told of the impending tragedy and he wept.

Abraham, however, enters fully into the House of Sorrows through what we may call the Abrahamic sacrifice. On the authority of the sixth and eighth *Imāms*, although God commanded Abraham to slay the paradisial lamb instead of his son Ishmael, Abraham wished he could slay his own son so that his heart might experience the grief of a father who slays the dearest of his children. In an interesting and highly dramatic dialogue between God and Abraham,³² the latter expresses bitter grief for the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and declares it to be more painful to him than the slaying of Ishmael with his own hands. As the Holy Family is held by the *Shī'ī* community to be dearer than wealth and life, so too were they regarded by the ancient prophet.

Furthermore, by the Abrahamic sacrifice the friend (*khalīl*) of God was not intended to demonstrate trust and obedience to his Lord, but rather to link through sorrow his own prophetic mission to the *imāms* and their sorrows, in spite of the implicit demand in the Qur'ānic text³³ for obedience. The sacrifice, central in Islām, is here given a secondary place. Abraham wishes to slay his son with his own hand not because of the divine command in itself but rather to share in the sorrows of Muḥammad for his grandson, the martyred *Imām*. Note the comment of Majlisī:

The ransoming of Ishmael by a great sacrificial victim may refer to the ransoming of the grief of Abraham that he would have had for his son by his grief for Ḥusayn as though he would have slain his own son with his own hand. For our *imāms* are more noble (*ashraf*) than the prophets with power (*ulū al-'azm*) and therefore nobler still than all other prophets.³⁴

On a still more popular level Abraham, like Adam, is made to share concretely in the pain of the martyred *Imām*. Riding his horse one day, Abraham passed through Karbalā'. At the spot where Ḥusayn's blood was to be shed, he fell off his horse, suffering a deep wound in his head, and his blood gushed out. He begged divine forgiveness and said, 'What sin have I committed now?' Gabriel came down and said to him, 'You have committed no sin, but here will be killed the descendant of the seal of the prophets and son of the seal of the vicegerents (*awsīyā'*) and your blood has flowed in emulation of his blood.' Abraham asked who the murderer would be and was told, 'He is the accursed of the denizens of the heavens and the earths and the pen has moved of its own accord on the tablet cursing him without permission of its Lord. God however revealed to the pen that "You have deserved approbation for this deed".' Abraham lifted his hands up to heaven and cursed Yazīd at length; his horse responded with 'Amen'. Abraham asked the beast, 'What have you understood to agree thus with my invocations?' The horse answered in clear speech that it was honored to have the Prophet ride on it and ashamed to have thrown him off, but that it also shared the grief for Ḥusayn and wished its master to share in the pain.³⁵

Abraham's first born, Ishmael, the ransomed child and ancestor of

the Arabian Prophet and his family, was also informed of the tragedy of Karbalā'. His sheep, grazing the banks of the Euphrates, refused to eat or drink on the spot of Karbalā'. Ishmael asked Gabriel the reason for the animals' unusual behavior, and was told to ask the sheep. The sheep spoke to him, relating the grievous event to come and their sorrow for the *Imām*, thus refusing to drink and eat on the spot where Ḥusayn would die thirsty and hungry with no one to lend him support.

The stories of Abraham and his son, Ishmael, demonstrate the universal tragedy of Muḥarram and the superiority of animals over men in their knowledge of, and grief for, the wronged *Imām* and his family. Animals, because they are irrational creatures, possess a kind of mysterious knowledge; more than any human being, they can claim to be innocent of the blood of the martyrs, or even of approving the wrong done them. Animals do, as we shall see, share fully in the suffering and fighting on the behalf of the *Imām*. Not only animals and birds but all of nature and even the elements participate in the House of Sorrows.

Since Moses, the interlocutor of God (*Kalīm Allāh*), received a fuller revelation of the martyrdom of Karbalā' than all the prophets before or after him until Muḥammad; his story contains a summary statement of the entire tradition concerning Ḥusayn's mission and martyrdom. A long descriptive narrative directly from God tells him of the sufferings and hardships of Ḥusayn and his family, the manner in which Ḥusayn will be killed, and the great torments awaiting his murderers. The Mosaic tradition under consideration displays all the characteristics of a pietistic tradition read into the mouth of a venerable ancient prophet. The tradition, moreover, is linked with the intercessory privileges of Moses and is regarded as an integral part of his sacred revelation.³⁶

Jesus (*Isā*) and John the Baptist (*Yahyā*), son of Zechariah (*Zakarīyyā*), occupy a prominent place in the House of Sorrows. Jesus, although not martyred according to Islām, still was wronged and rejected by his people, and in the end was saved through direct divine intervention. A discussion of the signs and portents accompanying the death of a prophet or an *imām* ascribed to the fifth *Imām*, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, mentions him:

On the night that 'Alī was killed, under every stone that was turned there was found congealed blood. The same thing happened also when Aaron (*Hārūn*), brother of Moses, and Joshua, son of Nūn, were killed; when Jesus was lifted up to heaven, and when Simon Peter (*Sham'ūn al-Ṣafā*) and Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī, were killed.³⁷

Jesus was the son of the pure virgin (*batūl*) Mary, the mistress of women. Mary was pious and poor, and was sustained by God as a sign of His special favor and mercy to her. Fāṭimah the radiant, 'the great Mary' (*al-Maryam al-Kubrā*),³⁸ shares these characteristics in Islāmic piety, as we shall see later in this chapter. Jesus is therefore, in some sense, the brother of Ḥusayn. The latter cannot claim virgin birth, but they share a miraculous nativity in that they were in the womb for only six months. A few traditions attribute this miraculous nativity to John the Baptist as well. In fact, the two personalities of Jesus and John often tend to merge into one figure closely analogous to that of Ḥusayn in popular piety.

As Jesus, we are told, was roaming the wilderness with his disciples, he came upon Karbalā'. On the exact spot where the *Imām* was to be killed, a lion blocked their path. Jesus spoke to the beast, asking why he would not let them pass. The lion answered in clear speech, saying, 'Here will be killed the descendant (*sibt*) of Aḥmad (Muḥammad) and I will not let you pass until you curse his murderers.' The Prophet inquired about who his murderer would be and was told, 'He is the accursed of the inhabitants of heavens and earth, of the beasts of the fields and the fish of the sea, he is Yazīd.' Jesus lifted up his hands to heaven, cursed the evil man and his accomplices four times; the disciples responded with 'Amen', and the lion bowed his head reverently and let them pass.³⁹

In another tradition, a group of gazelles were grazing in Karbalā' as Jesus approached the spot where Ḥusayn was to be killed. The animals sat in lamentation of the *Imām*'s death and related its details to Jesus. Jesus thereupon envisioned the tragic event himself, described it vividly and enjoined his own people to lend support to the martyred *Imām*. This tradition is especially important, because 'Alī is supposed to have found the manure of those same gazelles.⁴⁰

Some *Shī'ī* extremists went so far as to make Ḥusayn son of Fāṭimah

like Jesus son of Mary in every respect. Thus Ḥusayn is depicted as raising the dead, and if he did not speak in the cradle,⁴¹ he praised God in the womb and later made an infant speak in order to reveal its mother's adultery.⁴² Still other *Shī'ī* extremists have gone on to declare, that, like Jesus, Ḥusayn did not die but was taken up to heaven.

Shī'ī tradition links John the Baptist, Yaḥyā son of Zechariah, with Ḥusayn as well. His whole life was a protest against human folly and the love of material possessions. Although he was martyred, he continued to the end to reproach the wicked king⁴³ for his evil deeds. John's father, Zechariah, a pious dweller of the house of God who spent his old age in prayers and worship, was taught the names of the five members of the Holy Family. Whenever he mentioned or recalled the first four names, his sorrow left him; for in them he found consolation and relief. When he mentioned the fifth, his heart became heavy and his eyes welled up with tears. When he complained of this to God, he received in answer the letters *kaf ha ya 'ayn ṣad*.⁴⁴ The meaning of these letters was asked of the twelfth *Imām* during his lesser concealment. After relating the story of Yaḥyā, he said '... the *kaf* stands for Karbalā', the *ha* refers to the annihilation (*halāk*) of the pure family, the *ya* symbolizes Yazīd the murderer of Ḥusayn, the '*ayn* is his (Ḥusayn's) thirst (*aṭash*) and the *ṣad* is his patience or endurance (*ṣabr*).' The twelfth *Imām* then continued, 'Thus Zechariah begged his Lord to grant him a son to be his heir, whom he should love exceedingly. Then God would allow him to be grieved for his son's martyrdom as would Muḥammad for the martyrdom of his son Ḥusayn.' The *Imām* concluded, 'Yaḥyā was in the womb for six months and so was Ḥusayn. He was slain as Ḥusayn was also, and the heaven and the earth wept for no one else but them.'⁴⁵

'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, the fourth *Imām* and only surviving son of Ḥusayn, said that on their way to Karbalā' his father often spoke of Yaḥyā, repeating, 'It is indeed indicative of the worthlessness of this world in the eyes of God that the head of Yaḥyā, son of Zechariah, was presented to a reprobate (*baghī*) from among the children of Israel.'⁴⁶ He then recounts, on the authority of his father, the story of the Prophet's struggle against the wicked king and his final vindication.⁴⁷

1.3 THE PRIVATION AND POVERTY OF *Ahl al-Bayt* AND THEIR FAVOR WITH GOD

It was argued at the beginning of this discussion that suffering has its own merit with God, that it is the road to salvation for the man of faith and that it is good in itself as a means of purification of the soul and a test of the faith of the pious. Humility before God can be most deeply expressed through patient endurance of suffering by the man of faith. For the people of the Prophet's household, this meant the endurance of poverty and hunger, persecution and privation, and finally the cup of martyrdom as the seal of their struggle (*jihād*) in the way of God. Yet, as we shall see, the reward was already present in the promise of comfort and bliss, riches and vindication, and even a foretaste of the fruits of paradise here on earth. The interplay of sorrow and joy, privation and plenty, humility and exaltation characterizes the holy family's life in this world's House of Sorrows.

One day, in the house of Umm Salamah (according to the *Shī'ah*, favorite wife of the Prophet), the Prophet lay down to rest under a mantle (*kisā'*). First his grandchildren Ḥasan and Ḥusayn came and lay down with him. Then 'Alī and Fāṭimah followed. When all five of them were under the mantle, the Prophet sat up, gathered the mantle over them all and exclaimed, 'O Lord, these are my family; take away from them all uncleanness and purify them with a great purification.'⁴⁸ Thus they became known as 'the people of the cloak' (*ahl al-kisā'*).⁴⁹

The cloak has become, in *Shī'ī* tradition, a vivid symbol of the unity of the family of the Prophet in sorrow and joy, in suffering and the bliss of paradise, and above all in the prophetic inheritance. They are seen as heirs to prophetic knowledge and leadership (*imāmah*) and sharers in the sorrows and sufferings, persecution and martyrdom which have been the lot of prophets from the beginning of human history. Martyrdom, according to a report attributed to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, '... opened with Abel and closed with Ḥusayn'.⁵⁰ Ḥusayn, however, was by no means the last martyr of the Holy Family: we are told that all the *imāms*, except the twelfth, were martyrs.⁵¹ All martyrs in the way of God, before and after Ḥusayn, are partakers in his martyrdom; he is known in *Shī'ī* as well as *Sunnī* tradition as the prince of martyrs (*sayyid al-shuhadā'*).

Another tradition set in a similar context of family intimacy, in many reports joined to the story of the cloak, portrays most dramatically the unity of the household of the Prophet in affliction. The tragic tale was related by ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, who heard it on the battlefield from his aunt, Zaynab, sister of *Imām* Ḥusayn; she in turn heard it from Umm Ayman, and verified it with her father, ‘Alī, on his deathbed.⁵²

One day the Prophet visited his daughter Fāṭimah, who made *ḥarīrah*, a kind of custard, for him. ‘Alī brought a tray full of dates, and Umm Ayman brought some curd and butter in an earthen vessel. When they had all eaten, the Prophet washed his hands and performed his ablutions while ‘Alī poured the water for him. Then he faced the *qiblah* in prayer and thanksgiving to God. He lifted his eyes to heaven for a long while and then prostrated himself on the ground. His body became increasingly tense. With his face still to the ground, he sobbed aloud, and all those around him wept for his weeping. When he sat up, ‘Alī and Fāṭimah asked him, ‘O Apostle of God, what makes you sob so? May God never cause your eyes to weep. That which we see of your situation has broken our hearts.’ He answered that he was rejoicing, thankful to God for his family; but the angel Gabriel had come down to him and said:

O Muḥammad, God, blessed and exalted be He, has seen what is in your heart and has known your joy in your brother (‘Alī), your daughter, and your two [grand]children, and has therefore completed His favor to you. He has gladdened your heart with His gift in that He made them, those who love them and their followers (*Shī‘ah*) to be with you in paradise. They shall be loved as you are loved and favored until you will all be contented. Yet with all this they shall all be afflicted in this world with many persecutions and hardships at the hands of men who shall hypocritically profess your religion (*millah*) and claim to be of your community (*ummah*). It is God’s choice (*khīrah*) for you that their places of martyrdom shall be many and their graves distant. Give praise to God, therefore, for His choice and accept His decree (*qadā’*).⁵³

Gabriel told the Prophet of ‘Alī’s martyrdom at the hands of the most wicked of God’s creatures, far from his home. The angel described

with moving vividness the lot of Ḥusayn and his companions. He predicted the establishment of the shrine of the *Imām* in Karbalā' and the role this shrine would play in the lives of the pious. The angel, moreover, recounted the lot of the followers of the Holy Family and their enemies on the Day of Resurrection. Of Ḥusayn specifically he says,

And your son . . . will be killed with a group of your own descendants and some of the elect of your community in a land called Karbalā' on the banks of the Euphrates. For the sake of this land, sorrow (*karb*) will be multiplied for your enemies and the enemies of your progeny on a day whose remorse and sorrow will never cease.⁵⁴

This tradition may be read either as a fantastic tale of rationalization, the product of an oppressed people, or as a story with profound symbolic significance for human life. Suffering, according to this tradition, must accompany divine favor and high status with God, not only for the martyrs themselves but also for all those who choose to share their lot. With the Great Martyr, they will enter into the House of Sorrows, which becomes a bridge to paradise, the garden (*jannah*) of the prophets.

The cloak (*kisā'*), when viewed in the light of this tradition, becomes itself the House of Sorrows and a symbol of infinite grace for the sorrowful family and their friends. Ḥusayn's martyrdom is cosmically significant, as the tradition just cited tells us, because he is the 'fifth of the people of the cloak' (*khāmis aṣḥāb al-kisā'*). The mere existence of the people of the cloak on earth is considered to be a divine favor (*lutf*). When the Prophet died, four were left in whom men found grace and consolation; and they found it in each one of them after the death of another, for the presence of one was like the presence of all. When Ḥusayn died, however, there was no one left of the five, and thus his death was like the death of all of them.⁵⁵

A short prophetic sermon or monologue delivered by the Prophet to his companions and the Muslim community of Medina⁵⁶ tells of the suffering of the four people of the cloak individually in some detail. This tradition reveals not only the persecution of the Holy Family, but also their high station with God and the Prophet's love for them. The

persecutors are even more roundly condemned in this account, for they knew what kind of people they were going to wrong and they knew that their punishment would match the gravity of their act.

It is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet was one day sitting with his companions when Ḥusayn came to him. He looked at the child and wept, embraced him and seated him on his left leg. Then Ḥasan came and the Prophet, seeing him, wept and seated him on his right leg. Fāṭimah and 'Alī then followed and he looked at them and wept. His companions, wondering at this, asked why he wept as he saw each one of them. He said: 'These are the noblest among God's creatures and most beloved of Him and of me.'⁵⁷ He then recounted the wrongs 'Alī would experience after him: he would be deprived of the seat (that is, the seat of authority: *khilāfah*) for which God had chosen him; he would continue to be opposed and troubled until struck on the head with a sword so that his beard was bathed in his own blood (and this during Ramaḍān, the holiest of months). Both portents form a precise account of the tragic career of 'Alī seen from the *Shī'ī* point of view.

The tradition of the Prophet then goes on to describe the privation, persecution, and wrongs that Fāṭimah was to suffer at the hands of prominent members of the Muslim community. Fāṭimah is usually depicted in *Shī'ī* sources as a bitter woman who spent her last days mourning the death of her father and refusing any contact with the outside world. Her sufferings and final death constitute the first tragedy of Islām and the cult that grew up around her personality is not limited to the *Shī'ī* community alone. The tradition that we are considering here must be regarded as a later account read back into the mouth of the Prophet, albeit one that is generally accepted with minor variations by Muslims. The events leading to her death as seen by Islāmic piety will be discussed later in this chapter.⁵⁸

Of Ḥasan, the tradition reports that the Prophet said he would be deprived of his inheritance, the caliphal office, after his father, stabbed by those claiming to be his supporters, and finally martyred by poisoning. The heavens and the earth would mourn him, and the eyes of those who weep for him will not be blinded on that day when many eyes will be blinded.

Speaking of Ḥusayn, the tradition quotes Muḥammad as follows:

As for Ḥusayn, he is flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood; he is my son, my child, and the best of creatures after his brother. He is the *Imām* of the Muslims, the master of the faithful and representative (*khalīfah*) of the Lord of the worlds. He is helper of them that call for help, the cave [refuge] for those who seek refuge, and the Proof of God for all His creatures. He is the master of the youths of paradise and the gate to the salvation of the community (*ummah*). His commands are my commands, and obedience to him is like obedience to me. He who obeys him is of my people and he who disobeys him is not. Thus when I saw him I recalled what will be done to him after me. I see him taking refuge in my sanctuary (*ḥaram*) but no one will come to his support. I shall then press him to my bosom in his dream and order him to depart from the home of my migration (*hijrah*). I shall announce to him his martyrdom in the land of sorrow (*karb*) and calamity (*balā'*) and of death and annihilation. A small number of the faithful will come to his aid; these are the masters of the martyrs of my community on the Day of Resurrection. I can see him shot with an arrow and falling dead off his horse. Then will he be slain like a lamb.⁵⁹

Clearly, in traditions such as this and the others previously cited, much later history and interpretation has been read back into the mouth of the Prophet, his immediate companions, and members of his family. Yet these *Shī'ī* traditions can claim authenticity, since most are related on the authority of one or another of the *imāms*, or by a close relative of the Prophet. The tradition just considered is a very early one;⁶⁰ it and others of this sort have served as bases for the development of the Muḥarram cult and are still recited or paraphrased in the *ta'zīyah majālis*.

Led by the *imāms* themselves, the pious looked to the life and sayings of the Prophet and his immediate family for traditions to guide them on their own journey along the *Via Dolorosa*, the road of suffering and humiliation leading to the eternal bliss of paradise. The poor and destitute found in the life of the Holy Family an example of endurance amid poverty and hunger; the sickness and privation of Fāṭimah the radiant provided solace and hope for the sick and deprived.

Many traditions mention the hunger and poverty of the Holy

Family, yet almost all insist that poverty is the adornment of the pious, especially of the members of the house of prophethood (*bayt al-nubūwah*). God always proves their favor through a miracle of plenty, and not only they but also the neighborhood are fed. The tradition is not unlike Jesus feeding the multitudes; and to some extent they serve a similar function, assuring a hungry people of divine favor and compassion.

The Prophet one day came to his daughter in search of something to eat, having had nothing for three days. She sadly admitted that she had nothing to offer, and that the family was also hungry. When one of the neighbors sent her a dish with two loaves and a piece of meat, she called the Prophet to eat. She uncovered the dish to find enough food for all of them and their neighbors. The Prophet asked his daughter, 'My daughter . . . how comes this to thee?' 'From God', she said. The Prophet beamed with joy and exclaimed, 'Praise be to God who made you like the mistress of the women of the world among the women of the children of Israel in her time. . . .'⁶¹

(The many traditions surrounding the hunger and poverty of the Prophet's family serve several purposes for the pious. They are usually recalled, with elaborate embellishments and a wealth of emotion, at the sessions (*majālis*) of *ta'zīyah* where people vicariously share the feelings of hunger and privation with the Holy Family. They can feel that in their own sufferings they are sharing in the sufferings of the Holy Family.) Later, when circumstances allow, the pious give for the Holy Family's sake, in emulation of their generosity.⁶²

Tales such as those that we have been considering convey no theological or metaphysical ideas, yet they provide the basis for many mystical and gnostic notions. We cannot deal with these ideas here, as we are concerned mainly with the popular piety from which such esoteric doctrines arose.⁶³ It must be observed, however, that while no systematic thought on the character of the Holy Family is present in the popular literature under consideration, much that was recorded more systematically is based on, or even found in, popular piety. This will become amply clear in our discussion of the imamate in the following chapter.

Shī'ī thought, popular as well as theological, has claimed that in many of the verses describing the believers and their virtues, the

Qur'ān refers first and foremost to *ahl al-bayt*, then to their followers (the *Shī'ī* community), and only then to the rest of the believers or mankind in general. It asserts that the *imāms* are the 'companions of the Qur'ān',⁶⁴ the living Word in the true sense of this expression. Their lives and deeds are the exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Holy Book. We are told that the *sūrah* entitled *Man (al-Insān)* was revealed to describe them, for they truly fulfilled its exhortations.⁶⁵

The actual application of the Qur'ānic text to the Holy Family is contained in the following hagiographical tale. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn one day fell ill, and the Prophet came with all his companions to see them. He suggested to 'Alī that he make a vow to God so that the children might be brought back to health. 'Alī and Fāṭimah, their maid Fiḍḍah and even the two children vowed to fast for three days if God would grant health to them. On the first day, they had nothing in the house with which to break their fast that evening. So 'Alī went to a Jewish weaver called Sham'ūn (Simon) and asked for a bundle of wool for the daughter of Muḥammad to spin in return for three bushels of barley and a tray of dates. She spun one third of the wool and baked one bushel of the barley, making five loaves, one for each of them. When they sat down to eat, 'Alī was the first to break bread. Before he had time to put food into his mouth, however, a poor man came to the door and said, 'Peace be upon you, O household of Muḥammad; I am one of the poor of the Muslims. Give me some of what you are eating; may God feed you at the tables of paradise.' 'Alī put down the piece of bread and said to his wife, 'O Fāṭimah, you woman of approbation and certainty of faith, O daughter of the best of men, see you not this destitute standing at our door with a sorrowful cry complaining to us of his hunger . . .?' She answered, 'Your order will be obeyed, O cousin of mine, for in me there is neither malice nor miserliness. Now will I feed him without worry, by this seeking only the grace of intercession into paradise.' She then gave the poor man all that was before them and they slept hungry that night, having tasted nothing but water.

The next day she prepared their evening meal (*ifṭār*) as she had the day before, but this time an orphan stood at the door and repeated the words of the poor man of the previous evening. 'Alī addressed his wife, saying, 'O Fāṭimah, daughter of the magnanimous one, O

daughter of the Prophet who is not tight-fisted, God has sent us this orphan, and he who shows mercy today will be shown mercy tomorrow. His reward will be the paradise of bliss which God has prohibited to the hard-hearted.' With sadness, but still greater chivalry, she answered, 'I shall give to him with no care, leaving my own children to the providence of God, for they, my two young lions, will sleep hungry.'

When they had sat to eat on the third day, an Arab captive stood at the door and spoke reproachfully, 'You capture us, bind us fast, and yet do not feed us'. 'Alī, moved by this remark, addressed his wife, 'O Fāṭimah, daughter of the Prophet Aḥmad . . . here is a captive in chains complaining to us of his hunger. He who feeds today will find his reward tomorrow with the most high, the most glorious.' Fāṭimah this time raised a sorrowful supplication: 'All we have left is the bread of one bushel which I feebly kneaded and baked with my own hand. On my head I have no veil and all I have is a cloak which I have woven.' She bemoaned her poverty: 'These are my children; O Lord, behold they are hungry. Let me not lose them. . . .' She gave to the captive all that they had and they went hungry for the third day.⁶⁶

The next day the Prophet called to see them and was despondent at their plight. He prayed God to provide for them, and his prayer and those of the three destitute men were immediately answered. The angel Gabriel came down with a golden dish inlaid with precious stones and filled with meat and sweets of paradise. They all ate to satiation and the food was not diminished.

Popular tales like this one must have an end. They must answer the simple question which anyone hearing the tale would ask: namely, what happened to the heavenly table? It was taken back to heaven because Ḥusayn sought unknowingly to give some of the heavenly food to outsiders. A Jewish woman saw him playing in the streets with a piece of the blessed food in his hand. In amazement she exclaimed, 'You the family of hunger and need, where do you get such things; give me this to eat.' As the child stretched out his hand to give her the sacred substance, the angel came down, snatched the food from his hand, took the magic dish, and returned to heaven. The Prophet could then say, 'By God, had he [Ḥusayn] not wanted to give her the food,

the dish would have remained with my descendants, undiminished to eat from until the Day of Resurrection.⁶⁷

The verses which this tale fulfills read, ‘. . . they give food, for the love of Him, to the needy, the orphan, the captive; “We feed you only for the Face of God; we desire no recompense from you, no thankfulness . . .”’⁶⁸ The exegete who transmits this tradition comments, ‘By God, they said nothing of this to the three men, rather it was the intention of their hearts.’⁶⁹

It was not the lack of charity that caused the food to disappear finally, but rather the food itself and the logic of such tales: the food was a supernatural substance and could be eaten only by the people for whom it was intended. The tale, moreover, had to account for its disappearance and answer a simple question. It must be added that this tale is a very early one; the writer of *al-Manāqib* transmits it on many authorities, both *Sunnī* and *Shī‘ī* exegetes. Shaykh Ṣadūq relates this story on the authority of the *imāms* in a memorial service (*majlis*) held in Ṣafar 368/978–9.⁷⁰

The friends (*awliyā’*) of God enjoys a nearness to Him which often borders on free intimacy. God feeds and clothes them; He flames with anger for their sufferings at the hands of men; He exults with pride of them before His angels. The two children of the House of Sorrows used to play with Gabriel, the emissary of God to men, often jumping on the angel’s shoulders and pulling all the pranks of little children. At such times the angel assumed the form of Daḥyā al-Kalbī, the most handsome man of his time. One day as the two little boys were prancing around the angel, he stretched out his hand as though reaching for something, and handed them an apple, a pomegranate⁷¹ and a quince. The Prophet told them to take the fruits and share them with their parents. He later joined them and they all ate of the fruit; but whatever they ate was miraculously replaced. Thus the three fruits of paradise remained as they were after the death of the Prophet, and neither changed nor diminished until Fāṭimah died. With her death the pomegranate disappeared. Ḥusayn, the authority of this tradition, said that when his father ‘Alī was martyred, the quince also disappeared, but the apple remained as it had been. So when Ḥasan was poisoned, only the original apple remained: it was in Ḥusayn’s possession, but the tradition implies that it had lost the power to multiply itself.

Ḥusayn used to smell it whenever he faced hardship and found in it much consolation and relief. When he was prevented from reaching the waters of the Euphrates at Karbalā', he smelled it both for relief and to quench his thirst. An hour before he died, his son 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn saw him biting it in desperation, a sign that his death was near. After his father's death, he sought the apple but could not find any trace of it. He asserted, however, that its sweet fragrance continued to emanate from his father's tomb, and only the sincere follower of the Holy Family can smell it before dawn.⁷²

Fruits are the food of paradise and a sign of divine favor or blessing (*barakah*). It is implied in the tradition just considered that the angel gave the Holy Family the actual fruits of paradise, enabling them to partake of the blessings of the heavenly garden even in the present life; blessings that in the end will be theirs to enjoy forever and to grant to their sincere followers. The *barakah* and favor they found with God flows beyond the small community of the faithful, proclaiming to the world the miraculous power of the Holy Family. No tradition is complete in its purpose, however, if it does not express the particular sufferings of the Holy Family as well as the suffering of all things with them. As we see here, the fragrance of the apple remained as a reminder to the pious of the sufferings and martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn; this detail must be considered important to the purpose of this tradition. For the pious devotees, this tradition and others like it provide a basis for the special sanctity of fruits, and more particularly for the three just mentioned. One can still observe these fruits, when in season, being distributed among the audience of the Muḥarram memorial services.

Not only fruits, however, but trees and the earth itself share in the blessings granted by God through the Holy Family, and are used to express in some way or another their sufferings.⁷³ Each of the traditions here considered serves many purposes; most prominently, every tale provides a portent or sign depicting one of the calamities of the Holy Family.

Besides kindling the religious fervor of the pious, the traditions dealt with so far serve yet another purpose. The special favors of heavenly food to feed the Holy Family, the manner in which God loved and cared for the 'People of the House', contrast sharply with the cruel treatment they received at the hands of wicked men. This

divine favor and infinite love for the household of Muḥammad is manifested dramatically to the community of their followers through hardships and afflictions. God created all things for their sake, yet He chose that they be strangers in a world whose creation and subsistence depended on them.

To be poor and hungry, wronged and finally martyred was the Holy Family's lot and privilege. But God and His angels consoled them and manifested their favor with God to the community, including their persecutors. We are told in many traditions, as we shall see in the third chapter of this study, that angels were heard rejoicing when Ḥusayn was born and weeping when he cried as an infant.

As children, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn one day complained to their mother that all their playmates would have new clothes to wear for the *ʿĪd* (festival) while they would have none. Not wishing to disappoint them, she told them that their clothes were still at the tailor's; when he brought them, they would also have new clothes. The eve of the day of festivities came and the clothes had not arrived. The children, after reminding her once more, went to sleep sad and disappointed. In the night, a man knocked at the door and said that he was the tailor bringing the clothes for the children. The next day the Prophet informed his daughter that the man of the night before was no tailor but Riḍwān, the angel, keeper of the treasures of paradise.⁷⁴

In another version of this tradition, the children went to the Prophet complaining that they had no clothes for the *ʿĪd* festivities. The faithful spirit, Gabriel, came down with two white garments of paradise for them. The children, however, preferred bright colors, so the angel poured water on the garments while the Prophet rubbed them with his hands to bring out colors miraculously. Each of the two children chose the color he wanted; Ḥasan chose green and Ḥusayn red. The angel then told the Prophet the meaning of their choices. Ḥasan chose green, the color his own body would assume after drinking the poison which would kill him. Ḥusayn chose the color of blood, with which his body would be bathed on the battlefield of Karbalā'. The Prophet grieved as he heard the details of the impending tragedy of his family and especially that of Karbalā'.⁷⁵

The traditions we have been examining and others like them are presented in the Muḥarram memorial services (*majālis*) to heighten the

emotions of the participants. It must be emphasized that those present at such services are not an audience or mere spectators, but active participants in the sacred drama. The significance of the services is not obscured by the legendary or fantastic details that fill the stories; those details constitute a living reality ever present in the lives of the pious, a reality which grows more real with every succeeding generation. The dramatic effect of these stories is sustained throughout by an element of tension through contrast. In most of them privation is contrasted with plenty, poverty with riches, weakness and humiliation with revenge and vindication. Yet throughout the mood of sorrow and suffering predominates; and reward, revenge and vindication are held up as a promise for which the faithful feel an intense longing, expressed by their tears and outcries. Both the suffering and the promise are interiorized by the participants who make them their own.)

1.4 THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF FĀṬIMAH THE RADIANT ONE, MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE OF SORROWS

One of the most tragic characters in all of human history, according to *Shī'ī* piety, is Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', the radiant one, who dwelt all her short life in the House of Sorrows, becoming its mistress for all time until the Day of Resurrection, the day of her final vindication. She was born to a despondent and rejected mother, who died shortly after her birth. Fāṭimah died a martyr, and still dwells in the House of Sorrows in paradise, lamenting her slain son, the angels sharing her grief. Thus she will continue until the day of final reckoning when God Himself will exact vengeance on those who wronged her.

We have already seen the pathetic description, attributed to the Prophet, of her plight after his death. *Shī'ī* tradition asserts that while 'Alī was busy preparing the Apostle of God for burial, the people outside were busy wrangling over the question of succession (*khilāfah*). For the *Shī'īs* there is no doubt that 'Alī was the rightful successor to the Prophet, as proclaimed at the spring (*ghadīr*) of Khumm shortly before the Prophet's death. When 'Alī refused to come out of the house and pledge allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Abū Bakr, 'Umar and the mob outside burnt the door of his house, threatening to

burn the house over him and his family if he persisted in his opposition. Then Fāṭimah came to the door with disheveled hair and exposed face, weeping and reproaching the companions of her father. She was beaten and disgraced, and 'Alī had to give *bay'ah* under duress.

After Abū Bakr became caliph, Fāṭimah went to him to claim her father's inheritance, the garden of Fadak outside Medina. Abū Bakr protested that he had heard the Apostle of God say, 'We the prophets neither inherit nor give inheritance.'⁷⁶ She finally convinced him of her right to Fadak, but was met by 'Umar on the way, who tore up the deed Abū Bakr had written for her.⁷⁷ Thus the daughter of Muḥammad, soon after his death, began to suffer the wrong foretold by him. She returned to her husband, complaining

Behold how the son of Abū Quḥāfah [Abū Bakr] has usurped from me the inheritance of my father, and has shown me great hostility. Thus the women of Medina have deserted me, and the women of the immigrants (*muhājirūn*) have withheld from me their support, and the whole community has turned their eyes away from me; so I have no supporter or protector. I left my home angry, and returned coerced, and there is no choice for me. I wish I had died before my humiliation, and had passed away before my appointed time. Let my complaint be to my Lord . . . O my God! O my father! O God, Thou art the most powerful.⁷⁸

Tradition indicates that Fāṭimah was a frail woman, often falling asleep while turning the handmill to make bread for her family. In such cases, an angel from heaven came to help her. One day the Prophet came to her house and saw her grinding barley, clad in a garment made of coarse camel wool. He looked at her and wept, saying, 'O Fāṭimah bear patiently the bitterness of this world, for great will be the bliss of the hereafter.' Jābir b. 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī, the transmitter of this tradition, said, 'It was then that the verse, "Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied", was revealed.'⁷⁹

She desired one day to have a ring, and told her father of her wish. He advised her to pray for one after her last evening prayer and surely God would give it to her. When she woke up the next morning she found a beautiful ring of sapphire under her pillow. The following night, however, she dreamt that she was in paradise where she was

shown many palaces all richly decorated and made of precious stones. She was told that all these palaces belonged to the daughter of Muḥammad. In one of them she saw a couch (*sarīr*) made of sapphire which was the same color as her ring. The couch, however, was missing a leg. Inquiring about this, she was told that Fāṭimah had desired a ring, so it had been made of the missing leg of the couch. The next day she related the dream to her father, who said, 'Daughter, God has chosen for us the hereafter over this world. Return the ring tonight putting it under your pillow, and it will be taken away.' Thus she regretted showing any desire for the things of this world and the ring was taken away from her.⁸⁰

This story is self-explanatory. Whatever one desires of this world, of that much will he be deprived in the next. The story, however, illustrates yet another thing: the daughter of Muḥammad, so poor and destitute in this world, will be infinitely rich in the world to come; for, even if she were to show desire for the material things of this world, her riches in heaven are so great that she could not exhaust a fraction of them.

Fāṭimah lived a short time after her father: according to various traditions, six months, seventy-five days, or only forty days.⁸¹ She spent her time lamenting her father's death until the people of Medina protested to her husband that her constant weeping was disturbing them. Instead she began to go by night to the graveyard and indulge in weeping.

According to many accounts, she died after a short illness; yet some traditions, while admitting this, still in a different context assert that she did not fall ill. Rather she felt her time to have come, and, not wishing her two young children to witness her departure, she took them by the hand to the mosque to stay a while with their father. Then she returned home, washed herself with the remains of the Prophet's burial ointments, shrouded herself, and laid down, facing the *qiblah*. She told Asmā', daughter of 'Umayy, her nurse, to call her three times after an hour; if she did not answer, she would have departed to her father. Asmā' returned and called but there was no answer. She went to the mosque and told 'Alī, who fainted when he heard of Fāṭimah's death. She had requested that no one pray over her except her husband, and that she be buried secretly by night. In the mosque, 'Alī

prayed, 'O God, behold the daughter of Thy Prophet! Take her out of the darkness into the light.'⁸² Immediately, a brilliant light shone from the spot for many miles. In the Baqī' (the cemetery of Medina), as 'Alī and Abū Dharr approached with the body, a voice called out, 'To me, to me, bring her to me!'⁸³ Thereupon they found an open grave in which they laid her. The earth flattened over it, so that no one knows or shall know where her grave is until the Day of Resurrection.

Popular tradition asserted that Fāṭimah died of a serious illness in order to substantiate the reports about her beating and the consequent miscarriage and illness of which she died. The Prophet also spoke of Mary, mother of Jesus, who was to come to console and to nurse her in her illness. It was also necessary, on the other hand, to emphasize the miraculous aspects of her death to show her favor with God. That could be done only by asserting not only that she voluntarily chose to join her father, after whose death her life became one of suffering and humiliation, but also that she chose the moment and manner of her own death. Thus it has been related that she died while prostrate in prayer.⁸⁴ In both cases, however, the heightened dramatic effect of the tragedy is intended to allow the people to fully interiorize this event and share in it. The apparent contradictions among various traditions regarding Fāṭimah's death are of little significance to the faithful, as long as the purpose of her life and death can be clearly seen.

It will be seen in the course of this study that the followers (*Shī'ah*) of the *imāms*, through their participation in the sufferings of the Holy Family, become one with the sufferers. They are identified with the *imāms*, as together they form the community of the elect. A fairly early writer quotes a statement of the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, expressing unequivocally this unity of the *imāms* and their followers.

. . . and God created the spirits of our followers (*Shī'ah*) from our own clay, and their bodies from another lump of clay, well guarded under His throne, but less exalted than ours. Yet God gave no share of that of which they were created to anyone except the prophets. Thus we and they are truly humans and the rest of mankind savages, and are destined to the fire.⁸⁵

This attitude of superiority over one's oppressors has characterized many persecuted communities. Examples are not difficult to find

throughout many periods in the history of the Jews and the early Christian church. That *Shī'ī* Muslims have always, in varying degrees, held this attitude is therefore not an unusual phenomenon.

The followers of the *imāms* will share fully in the rewards that are to be granted to the members of the House of Sorrows in the world to come. Like the wronged *imāms*, they have borne patiently the hardships, sufferings and persecutions for their loyalty to the House of Muḥammad. The *Shī'ī* community, in renewing every year the memory of the martyred *Imām* and his family and friends, renews its own covenant with the *imāms*, a covenant which is identified with the primordial trust (*amānah*)⁸⁶ that God offered to all of creation, but which only man accepted. This *amānah*, as we shall see later, is interpreted by the *Shī'ī* community to be the imamate of the twelve *imāms*. For this reason, to understand fully the role of Ḥusayn in the drama of suffering and redemption, some attention must be given to the concept and role of the *imāms* in popular *Ithnā'asharī Shī'ism*. The following discussion of the imamate will also illuminate much of what has already been said, and put the life of *Imām* Ḥusayn and his martyrdom in its proper context.

The Proofs of God Hujaj Allāh¹

We have attempted in the previous chapter of this study to depict the family of Muḥammad in their role as members of the House of Sorrows and their high status as the friends (*awliyā'*) of God and His elect. The *imāms*, like prophets and other great personalities in man's religious history, are seen by the *Shi'ī* community at one and the same time as humiliated and exalted, poor yet infinitely rich, persecuted and sorrowful, yet possessing both authority and bliss. Although they were finally martyred, for their sake the universe and all life was created. Through their suffering and martyrdom, the *imāms* will manifest their glory and authority on the last day. Their sufferings have confronted humanity with the choice of eternal bliss or damnation. The *imāms*, who are the friends (*awliyā'*) of God, are also His *khulafā'*, His vicegerents and representatives on earth, and the guardians of His revelation. It is this aspect of the concept and role of the *imāms* that we shall explore in the present chapter.

First, we shall examine the creation of the *imāms*: the manner of their creation and the substance from which they were created. We shall then consider their relationship to God and the world, and their place in the history of divine revelation or communication with mankind. The questions that concern us here are, first, the place of the *imāms* within the divine covenant with man, or what we may call the initial revelation or primordial trust (*amānah*) that God offered to all creation before the world was made; second, the relation of the *imāms* to actual revelations, especially the Qur'ān, as well as their relations to the prophets, especially to the Prophet Muḥammad (both as his descendants and as heirs to his prophetic mission and secret knowledge); and finally, the actual personality of the *imām*, the signs of his imamate, and his physical and spiritual characteristics. As in all other chapters of this study, we are concerned with *Shi'ī* piety as expressed in the sources we are examining.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the proper background for

the discussion of the life, mission and death of *Imām* Ḥusayn. It is important to emphasize a point that has already been stressed: namely, that Ḥusayn was from the beginning regarded by the Muslim community as much more than just a pious and virtuous man. He was the grandson of the Prophet, and this gave him a special place in the community and contributed much to the growth of the ideas and devotional practices that his death inspired. Nevertheless, the cosmic significance of his death, an idea that developed rapidly after his martyrdom, is due to a great extent to his office as an *imām*. It is as a part of his role as an *imām* that the sufferings and martyrdom of Ḥusayn have been regarded by the *Shī'ī* community as a source of redemption for themselves, as well as a source of judgment and condemnation for their opponents. This redemptive aspect of his suffering cannot be understood properly without some idea of the role of the *imāms* in the history of salvation. Nor would the *Shī'ī* views on his miraculous birth, his extraordinary life and his miraculous death be fully comprehended without such a background. Thus in this chapter we shall prepare the way for a consideration of Ḥusayn the *Imām* through an investigation of the imamate itself in *Shī'ī* Islām.

2.1 THE CREATION AND SUBSTANCE OF THE *Imāms*

The *imāms*, for *Shī'ī* Muslims, may be thought of as a primordial idea in the mind of God which found temporal manifestation in persons occupying a position midway between human and divine beings. They are human, or created, beings in that they do not share in the divine pre-eternal existence (*azaliyyah*) or eternal undying continuity (*abadīyyah*) of God; and, like all human beings, they are subject to death and resurrection. Yet they were first conceived in God's mind as a principle of order, harmony and goodness in the world; then they were made substantial as luminous entities or conventicles of light transmitted in the loins of prophets and wombs of holy women until they reached actualization in the Prophet Muḥammad. They were then born as men through the 'Prince of the Faithful' and first *Imām*, 'Alī, and his wife, Fāṭimah, the daughter of Muḥammad.

The divine qualities of the *imāms* may be clearly discerned in the

many traditions recounting the manner of their creation and their essential substance. Unlike other men, the *imāms* were shaped not of the dust of the earth, but were first created as forms of light singing the praises of God long before the material world came into being. In a long tradition, the Prophet addressed his daughter, saying:

O daughter! God, praised and exalted be He, cast a glance on the inhabitants of the earth and chose your father and made him a prophet. He cast a second glance and chose your husband, 'Alī, and made him a brother and vicegerent (*waṣī*) for me. He cast a third glance and chose you and your mother and made you the two mistresses of the women of the worlds. He cast a fourth glance and chose your two sons and made them the two masters of the youths of paradise. . . .²

All things were created, we are told in the Qur'ān, through the divine Word (*amr*),³ the divine fiat. The *imāms*, however, were chosen through the power of the divine eye. Thus it is not only the omnipotence of God the creator and His sovereignty which are manifested in the creation of the *imāms*, but also His compassion and love. For in creating the *imāms*, God, so to speak, turned His face toward the world, and His glance generated the Holy Family who are regarded as the true source of divine mercy. The *imāms* are therefore regarded in *Shī'ī* theological statements of belief (*'aqīdah*) as an act of divine grace,⁴ and the earth cannot be without an *imām* at any time.⁵

The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, declared, in answer to one of his disciples, that if the earth were to be void of an *imām*, it would melt away with all its inhabitants.⁶ The *imām*, as we shall see more clearly below, is the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) whose mere existence is necessary for the subsistence of the world. In fact, the *imām* attained a much greater religious significance very early in *Shī'ī* tradition than the perfect man ever did in later Sufism.⁷

The many traditions that relate the actual creation of the *imāms*, although containing many variations and disparities in detail, all have the same purpose: to show the exalted status of the *imāms* and their nearness to God. The sixth *Imām*, it is reported, related to one of his disciples, Abū Baṣīr, the manner of the creation of the Prophet

Muḥammad and the *imāms* in a divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*), uttered directly by God to Muḥammad.

God said, 'O Muḥammad! Verily I created thee and 'Alī as two lights [a spirit without body] before I created my heavens, throne, and the ocean. You never ceased then from praising and glorifying me. I then united your two spirits into one, and that also never ceased from praising and sanctifying me. I then divided the one spirit into two and two into four: Muḥammad, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.'

The *Imām* went on to say, 'Then God created Fāṭimah from light, first a spirit without a body, then He touched us with His right hand and His light shone in us.'⁸ From the context of this tradition, it appears that this last act, the manifestation of the divine light in the *imāms*, is related to their earthly existence.

We have already seen in the previous chapter of this study⁹ that the *imāms* were created before all things in the universe, and that they are greater than all creation. The tradition just cited goes a step further and suggests that the *imāms* preceded even the divine manifestation itself. They belong to that time before time was, to the time when God Himself was in 'absolute self-obscurity',¹⁰ before He had created His throne, the locus of His majesty, encompassing the entire universe.¹¹ The *imāms* are usually considered along with the great things of creation: visible things such as the heavens, the earth and the great ocean, and invisible things such as the throne of God, His angels and the tablet and pen of destiny. The *imāms* are declared to be greater than all the marvels of creation, which were created for their sake and whose sustenance depends on their existence.

It is of course difficult, and not altogether justified by the unsystematic nature of the materials examined in this discussion, to attempt any systematic construction of the mode of creation of the *imāms*. One can say, however, that they existed as essences of divine light before every created thing and then began to take form along with the rest of creation. As creation proceeded, they also moved from extremely subtle into more concrete forms. Even their human bodies were created of a special substance long before their actual birth into the world. Again Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, in describing this process of concretization, said,

God created us from the light of His majesty and formed us from a well guarded clay preserved under His throne. He then caused that light to dwell in it [i.e., the clay]. Thus we became luminous humans (*bashar nūrānīyyūn*) giving no share of the stuff of which we were created to anyone.¹²

2.2 THE PLACE OF THE *Imāms* IN HUMAN HISTORY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO DIVINE REVELATION (*Wahī*)

The *imāms* are the heirs of the prophets and share in honor and favor with God. They are the hidden meaning of the revealed word of which they are a concrete personification. We have already seen how the words of the Qur'ān refer first to them and secondarily to others.¹³ The sixth *Imām* goes a step further in this exegetical identification of the Word with the person in a brief exegesis of the famous 'Light' verse.¹⁴ A disciple asked the meaning of the 'Light' verse, and the *Imām* recited the verse with his commentary as follows:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche [Fāṭimah] wherein is a lamp [Ḥasan], the lamp in a glass [Ḥusayn], the glass as it were a glittering star [Fāṭimah is like the radiant star among the women of the world], kindled from a Blessed Tree [Abraham], an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West [neither Jewish nor Christian] whose oil well nigh would shine [knowledge is about to burst out from it], even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light [an *imām* proceeding from it after another *imām*]; God guides to His Light whom He will [God guides through the *imāms* whom he will].¹⁵

The *imāms* are not only symbols of the divine light or vessels through which it shines; rather they are both light and vessel.¹⁶ They are the true shoots of the 'Blessed Olive Tree', Abraham, who himself personified the true faith, the pure (*ḥanīf*) religion free from the deviations of East or West. Thus the *imāms* preserve in themselves the uncontaminated authenticity of divine revelation and continue its history unbroken. Finally, with the Qur'ān, they are the instrument of divine guidance. They are the 'speaking (*nāṭiq*) Qur'ān', the active or living

logos while the Qur'ān is the 'silent' (*ṣāmit*), immanent divine logos whose understanding and application depend on them.

The *imāms*, moreover, are the primordial covenant between God and the world, and His charge (*amānah*) which He offered to the heavens and the earth. The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, again said, instructing al-Mufaḍḍal, one of his chief disciples, on the meaning of the *amānah* verse of the Qur'ān:

God [blessed and exalted be He] created the spirits [of men] two thousand years before their bodies. He made the spirits of Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and of the other *imāms* the highest and noblest of all. God then manifested them [i.e., the spirits of the Holy Family] to the heavens, earth and mountains and their light dazzled them. He then said to the heavens, earth and mountains, 'These are my beloved ones, my friends (*awliyā'*), and my proofs (*ḥujaj*) over my creation and the *imāms* of my human creatures. . . . For those who love them [i.e., accept their authority (*walāyah*)] I created my paradise, and for them that oppose them and show enmity towards them I created my fire'.¹⁷

The *amānah*, or divine charge, is the *imāms* themselves and their *walāyah*, which here means both their nearness to God as His friends (*awliyā'*) and also their authority (*walāyah*) over men. God continues in the tradition just cited to threaten those who claim the *imāms'* prerogatives and to give assurances to those who recognize their authority:

He who claims for himself their status with me and nearness to my majesty, him will I punish with a torment not inflicted on anyone in the worlds and will consign him to the lowest pit of my fire with the associators (*mushrikīn*). But they who accept their authority (*walāyah*). . . will I make them enter with the *imāms* into the gardens of my paradise. To those people will I grant whatever they please; my favor (*karāmah*) will I freely bestow on them and cause them to dwell nigh unto me. I shall make them intercessors for the sinners of my men and women servants. Their *walāyah* [i.e., the *imāms'*] is the charge (*amānah*) I laid upon my creation. Who among you, therefore, would bear it with all its burdens and claim it for himself instead of my chosen ones.¹⁸

The *Imām* then commented that the heavens and the earth refused to bear the heavy burden of this charge or to claim high status with the majesty of God. Man, however, accepted it; man here means those people who claimed the authority of the *imāms* falsely.¹⁹

To accept this divine primordial charge actually means to accept the *imāms* as the mediators between God and men, to confess that their authority is absolute both in the spiritual and temporal realms. So the charge was offered to all creation; all things except man accepted it in humility and submission. Man, however, did not accept this charge as belonging to its rightful claimants, but foolishly claimed it for himself. For this reason, we are told, the Qur'ān called man 'wrongdoing and foolish'.

The *amānah*, the divine charge to men, was transmitted from one prophet to another, each one transmitting it to the elect of his people. Thus it will continue until the coming of the *Mahdī*, who will be given authority to judge persons and nations according to how worthily they bore the *amānah*. Then the earth will be renewed and the covenant of God with men be kept forever more.

The tradition under consideration pushes the Qur'ānic symbolism to its extreme limits. The heavens and the earth are not symbolically offered the *amānah* but actually warned of the consequences of rejecting it or claiming it for themselves. They are addressed by God, and, exactly like men, they receive the divine threat and promise. All creation must indeed share in the history of salvation and judgment through the primordial choice to affirm or to reject the divine covenant with creation, which is the absolute lordship of God²⁰ and the authority of His vicegerents in creation, the *imāms*.

A somewhat haggadic interpretation of the crucial role of the *imāms* in the divine plan of judgment and redemption is presented by the sixth *Imām* in the same tradition we have been considering. His interpretation concerns the actual cause of the sin of our first parents and the means of their forgiveness. We are told that when God created Adam and Eve, He put them in paradise, the Garden of Eden. He commanded them not to eat of the tree of wheat, the Islāmic counterpart of the apple tree in Western tradition. They saw the *imāms* near the throne of Divine Majesty as forms of light glorifying God. Astonished, they asked who these persons were and were told to look

on the leg of the throne, where they saw their names inscribed 'with the light of the Almighty'. Still marvelling, they exclaimed, 'Oh how greatly favored are the people of this station by Thee, how well beloved by Thee and how noble are they in Thy sight!'²¹ God then described the *imāms* and their place in creation to Adam and Eve saying,

Had it not been for their sakes, I would not have created you. For these are the treasurers of my knowledge and the ones entrusted with my great secret. Beware that you not look at them with envy and desire their high status and favor with me lest you incur by this my censure; enter into disobedience of me and be among the wrongdoers.²²

The tradition goes on in the usual form of such exegetical tales to relate that Adam and Eve asked to see the fire which God had prepared for these wrongdoers, and the fire showed its awful means of torture. They were warned not to look with envious and covetous eyes at the luminous *imāms*, but Satan whispered in their hearts words of envy, covetousness and disobedience, and they were tempted and fell into sin. God, however, wished to forgive them, and He sent the angel Gabriel who reproached them for coveting the high station of those who were better than they, and counselled them to pray for forgiveness in the names of the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭimah, her husband, their two children, and their descendants, the *imāms*. The sixth *Imām* concluded with the words, 'And God forgave them for He is the Forgiver, the Merciful.'²³

The wrong done through the sin of Adam and his wife could not be totally repaired. Before Adam's sin only good things existed. The forbidden tree bore wheat, the good grain. When, however, Adam and his wife ate of the tree, barley grew in the wheat's place, and only what was not touched by them remained wheat. The eighth *Imām*, commenting on the same tradition, said, 'The source of all wheat is what they did not eat, and the source of all barley is what grew in the place where they did eat.'²⁴

It may be remembered that, as a consequence of Adam's sin, Genesis tells us, 'cursed is the ground because of you. . . . thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. . . .'²⁵ The natural harmony was disrupted,

and the essential goodness of creation corrupted; man had to struggle with the earth for the goods it had given freely and of its own accord. The Qur'ānic term for man's fall from paradise literally means to fall or come down from a higher into a lower place.²⁶

Like nature, man could no longer return to his essential purity and bliss, but could only hope to attain his paradisaical state on a different plane of existence in the life to come, the life after death. The sin of Adam, according to this tradition, was caused by another sin: envy and covetousness. Only after Adam and Eve wished to be like the *imāms* was Satan able to tempt them. A tradition from the eighth *Imām*, al-Riḍā, presents an even neater parallel, reporting that Adam looked with envy at the *imāms* and Eve at Fāṭimah. Whereupon God gave Satan authority over them, and they ate of the forbidden tree.²⁷

The sin of Adam and Eve is a mild form of the sin of subsequent humanity. The first pair committed the sin of envy by wishing to be like the *imāms*, but later men committed the graver sin of claiming the *imāms*' authority and high status for themselves. Thus the Qur'ānic reproach of foolishness and wrongdoing to man is aimed by the *imāms* at the members of the Muslim community who rejected the divine charge by rejecting the *imāms* themselves and showing hostility to them and their followers.

The divine *amānah*, looked at in the abstract, is the knowledge of God, His revelations, and the imamate of the twelve *Imāms* who are the true guardians of divine revelations and possessors of the knowledge of its true meaning. Concretely, the *amānah* is the *imāms* themselves even as they appeared in flesh and blood in the world. They embody in their actual lives the true way (*sunnah*) of all the prophets; after cessation of revelation, they alone could communicate divine knowledge to men. The eighth *Imām*, speaking of the *imāms*, declared that God had made them his trustees in His heavens and earths. He goes on to say, '... through our worship can God be truly worshipped, and without us God would have never been worshipped.'²⁸

In a tradition attributed to the sixth *Imām*, we find perhaps the clearest statement summarizing most of the ideas about the *imāms* with which we have been concerned so far. It therefore deserves to be

quoted in full. The *Imām* is supposed to have addressed one of his disciples as follows:

O Khaythamah, we are the tree of prophethood and house of mercy; we are the keys of wisdom, the essence of knowledge, and the locus of apostleship, the frequenting place of angels and repositories of the secret of God. We are God's trust (*wadī'ah*) to His servants, and His great sacred object (*ḥaram*). We are the covenant (*'ahd*) of God [with men], and he who keeps our covenant has kept God's covenant.²⁹

We have seen throughout this study that the *imāms* are greater and more exalted than all the prophets who came before Muḥammad. As they and Muḥammad, their father, were created of the same divine light, they are his equals. Together with him they constitute the cream of humanity, the best of all creatures, earthly as well as celestial beings. Thus if the Qur'ān connects obedience to God and love of God to the obedience and love of His Apostle,³⁰ *Shī'ī* tradition equates rejection of the *imāms* with the most unforgivable sin, the sin of association or *shirk*.³¹

Although the *imāms* were not, as were the prophets before them, recipients of revelation, they are the heirs of all previous revelations in their various tongues.³² Revelations, like the Qur'ān and the *Injīl* (Gospel), were revealed to be transmitted to men. They possess a hidden or esoteric as well as an apparent or exoteric meaning. The *imāms* alone among men know the hidden meaning of revelation, and thus in them alone can revelation be preserved and fully communicated to others. It is not true, however, that the *imāms* received no revelation. Like the prophets before them, they were given knowledge of the 'Great Name of God', signifying secret knowledge that the prophets communicated only to their vicegerents (*awṣiyā'*) and to no one else.³³ God, we are told on the authority of the sixth *Imām*, has a great name composed of seventy-three letters. Seventy-two of these were communicated to the prophets of old; one remains hidden in His knowledge, disclosed to no one. Prophets like Jesus and Moses received a few letters each, through which they were able to perform miracles and prove the truthfulness of their missions to their people. Muḥammad, the last of the prophets, inherited all seventy-two letters

communicated to earlier prophets. These letters he communicated to the *imāms* after him.

The *imāms* likewise received an inheritance of secret knowledge passed from the Prophet to 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and from them to the rest of the *imāms*. One of these actual scrolls of written revelation is the tablet (*lawḥ*) of Fāṭimah. It was a tablet of emerald which God sent as a gift to her father on the occasion of the birth of Ḥusayn. It contained the names of her husband, 'Alī, and the *imāms* after him and described their hard lot in the world. Jābir b. 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī, one of the famous companions of the Prophet, who lived until the days of the fifth *Imām*, made a copy on a leather scroll. The fifth *Imām* summoned him one day and recited from memory the entire document. Then he assured Jābir that the tablet was in his possession and would be passed down from one *imām* to the next until it reached the *Mahdī*.³⁴

Another revealed text is the scroll (*muṣḥaf*) of Fāṭimah.³⁵ After the death of the Prophet, Fāṭimah was distraught with grief. An angel (in some sources, Gabriel) came to console her. He told her of all that was to take place in the world after her; and 'Alī wrote down everything she heard from the angel until he completed the text of the sacred scroll. The sixth *Imām*, on whose authority this tradition is related, described the *muṣḥaf* of Fāṭimah as a scroll three times larger than the Qur'ān, but not duplicating it in any way. It has nothing concerning legal sanctions (*ḥalāl*) and prohibitions (*ḥarām*). It contains knowledge of all that is to be until the Day of Resurrection.³⁶

The white *jafr*,³⁷ a scroll containing the tablets of Abraham and Moses, the Psalms (*zabūr*) of David and the Gospel (*Injil*) of Jesus, is also traditionally cited as inherited revelation; it does not, however, contain a Qur'ān. It is an inheritance from Adam, containing the knowledge of all prophets and vicegerents and the knowledge of the learned among the children of Israel who had passed away.³⁸ There is also a red *jafr*, a vessel containing the armor of the Apostle of God, the staff and actual tablets of Moses, and the shirt of Joseph. This latter *jafr* is a symbol of temporal authority, as the other is a symbol of prophetic gifts.

Finally, there is the *jāmi'ah*, said to be a long scroll, which may contain esoteric knowledge that the Prophet possessed but did not communicate to the rest of the community. It is supposed to have been

dictated by him to ‘Alī. The *jāmi‘ah*, from its title, appears to be a general text containing all knowledge, even knowledge of legal sanctions and prohibitions. It is, we are told, seventy cubits long as measured by the arm of the Apostle of God.³⁹

However exalted the position of the *imāms* may be, many traditions aim at distinguishing them from prophets, and especially from prophets like Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, sent as messengers with a specific revelation intended for other men. Among the texts considered above, only one, the *muṣḥaf* of Fāṭimah, can claim to be an original revelation. Yet the *muṣḥaf* of Fāṭimah cannot be considered a new revelation because it does not bring any new law (*sharī‘ah*), nor was it intended for the general community of Muslims or any people other than the *imāms* themselves. The red *jafr*, according to a tradition ascribed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq, ‘ . . . will be opened by the man of the sword [i.e., the *Mahdī*] for the sword’.⁴⁰

The traditions we are examining in this study, and many like them, have led some members of the *Shī‘ī* community to go so far in their devotion to the *imāms* as to regard them as gods in human form. The earliest awareness of such extremist dangers is expressed in a fairly well known tradition attributed to the Prophet and found in *Shī‘ī* as well as *Sunnī ḥadīth* collections. One day the Prophet addressed the Prince of the Faithful, saying:

‘O ‘Alī! by Him in whose hand my soul is, had it not been that some groups of my community would say of you what Christians had said of Jesus, son of Mary, I would say of you today things such that you would not pass by a group of Muslims without their taking the dust from under your feet seeking by it good favor (*barakah*).⁴¹

The sixth *Imām*, Ja‘far, horrified by the views of the extremists (*ghulāt*) and delegationists (*mufawwiḍah*),⁴² said:

God curse the extremists (*ghulāt*) and the delegationists (*mufawwiḍah*) for they took lightly disobedience to God. They disbelieved (*kafarū*) in Him and associated others (*ashrakū*) with Him. They went astray and led others astray wishing to escape the performance [of religious and legal] duties (*farā‘id*) and the rendering of obligations (*ḥuqūq*) [of God].⁴³

There were and still are many Muslims who reject most of the claims made by, and for, the *imāms* and accord them scant recognition. It is hardly enough, in the *Shī'ī* view, to regard the *imāms* just as good men and members of the Prophet's family. Rather, *Shī'īs* regard the supremacy of the *imāms* over all the men and their office as leaders and teachers of the community as essential to true Islām. Thus there were those who went so far in their veneration of the *imāms* as to accord them worship with God, and also those who rejected most of the traditions making high claims for the *imāms* as later and often non-Islāmic fabrications. Between these two extremes, moderate *Shī'ī* '*ulamā*' have for centuries been struggling for a more sober view of the *imāms*, one which would preserve their authority (*walāyah*) in the community without losing sight of their human character and limitations.

The sixth *Imām*, we are told, when asked if the *imāms* knew that which is hidden (*al-ghayb*), vehemently denied this, saying, 'When knowledge is opened for us we know, and when it is withdrawn, we do not know. . . .For God alone knows that which is hidden, and no one else knows anything save what God has granted him to know.'⁴⁴

2.3 THE PERSONALITY OF THE *Imām* AND SIGNS OF HIS IMAMATE

For *Shī'ī* Islām, the doctrine of the *imamate* is an integral part of the doctrine of prophethood. Although *imāms* cannot exist without prophets (of whom they are vicegerents or representatives [*awṣiyā'*]), they play a much more vital role than prophets in the creation, life and eschatology of the world. Like the prophet, the *imām* possesses the gift of miracles as proof of his claims and a sign of divine favor. Like only the greatest of the prophets, the *imām* is infallible, or, more precisely, protected (*ma'sūm*) from error. In a long polemical tradition,⁴⁵ the eighth *Imām*, 'Alī al-Riḍā, describes the *imām* thus:

. . . if then a servant has been chosen by God for the management of the affairs of His servants, God would open his breast for that and place in his heart the springs of wisdom and inspire him with knowledge in full measure. Thereafter, he [the *imām*] will be

incapable of giving wrong council or be amiss, from the right direction. For he is infallible and fortified, rightly guided and well succored, protected from sins and errors. God had favored him with all this that he may be a proof (*ḥujjah*) for His servants and His witness over His creation: 'That is the bounty of God; He gives it unto whomsoever He will; and God is of bounty abounding.'⁴⁶

In the same tradition, al-Riḍā describes the physical characteristics of the *imām* as a sign of his imamate. The passage is very interesting and brief enough to be quoted in its entirety:

The *imām* has signs (*'alāmāt*). Of all men he should be most knowing, most wise, most pious, most courageous, most generous and most prayerful. He should be born circumcised, clean and pure. He should be able to see what is behind him as he is able to see what is before him. He should cast no shadow. When he falls from his mother's womb, he should fall on the two palms of his hands [i.e., in prostration (*sujūd*)] raising his voice with the two *shahādas*,⁴⁷ professions of faith. Only his eyes, but not his heart, should sleep and he should not have wet dreams. He should be one spoken to by the angel [Gabriel] (*muḥaddath*).⁴⁸ The mail (*dir'*) of the Apostle of God should fit him, and his sword should be *dhū al-fiqār*. Neither his urine nor his feces should be seen, for God had charged the earth to swallow all that comes out of his body. His odor should be more fragrant than musk. He should be dearer to men than their own selves; and he should be more loving and compassionate towards them than their own fathers and mothers. He should rule by what is commanded [by God] and be most strict in the avoidance of that which is prohibited (*ḥarām*). His prayers should be answered, so that were he to pray for a hard rock to be split in two, it should be so. He should possess a scroll (*ṣahīfah*) containing the names of all his followers (*Shi'ah*) and another containing the names of his enemies till the Day of Resurrection. He should possess the *jāmi'ah* [see above] which is a scroll seventy cubits long and containing the knowledge of all that the children of Adam need. He should possess the greater [white] *jafr* and the smaller [red] *jafr* which is the whole skin of the sheep containing all branches of knowledge, even the price [or compensation] (*arsh*) of the smallest injury (*khadsh*), and

the punishment for an offense as one flogging (*jaldah*), one half a flogging and even one third of a flogging. He should possess the scroll (*mushāf*) of Fāṭimah.⁴⁹

In this tradition we see clearly that the *imām* not only possesses all the qualities of the perfect man or prophet, but combines with these all the special distinctions of the *imām*. In his piety, spiritual perfection and special favors (*karamāt*), the *imām* is like the perfect man. In his physical characteristics of valor, cleanness, generosity and general excellence, he resembles the perfect man not just of the Islāmic tradition but also of other traditions where this concept is found.⁵⁰ In the signs, or regalia, of his temporal power, the *imām*, although bearing some resemblance to the Jewish messiah, actually manifests his unique position in the history of religion. He is the perfect ruler possessing the actual power, wisdom and authority of Muḥammad, the Prophet and ruler: the ideal head of a community. The *imām* is a powerful expression of the hopes, aspirations and spiritual ideals not only of Muslims but also of religious men everywhere. Viewed in the context of the historical development of human spirituality, he stands at the summit of a mature spiritual elevation and personifies a human ideal nourished by human faith and culture, but never to be realized until creation has reached its moment of readiness for the final transformation.

We have seen in this chapter the central position that the *imām* occupies in *Shīʿī* Muslim piety, theological and religious thought, the role he plays in defining right conduct according to the *Sharīʿah* and his significance to the total *Weltanschauung*. Much space and attention has been devoted to the general concept of the *imām* in order finally to elucidate the specific personality, life and death of *Imām* Ḥusayn, the main concern of this study. Ḥusayn, the third *Imām*, occupies a unique place among the *imāms* of *Shīʿī* Muslims. He was brought up and nourished in a special way, as we shall see, by the Prophet from whom he directly received the prophetic inheritance. He was chosen by God to be the father of the *imāms* rather than his older brother Ḥasan. His highest distinction, however, is that he is the master of martyrs who made the greatest sacrifice in the way of God. Indeed, if the concept or ideal of the *imām* embodies all spiritual and physical perfections for the

Shī'īs, then *Imām Ḥusayn* can be regarded as the living perfection, or concretization, of this ideal. Many of the ideals and ideas discussed in this chapter will appear again, but in full life, with personality and meaning, as we follow the 'Master of the Youths of Paradise' from birth to martyrdom and beyond, to final vindication.

The Master of the Youths of Paradise *Sayyid Shabāb Ahl al-Jannah*¹

Among the *imāms* of the *Ithnā'asharīs* (Twelver *Shī'īs*), Ḥusayn, the third, and father of the remaining nine *imāms*, occupies a very special place. It has been a long established tradition in Islām to rank *imāms* and caliphs as to superiority (*afḍalīyyah*) based upon age, seniority and priority of office. Thus officially the best of the *imāms* and indeed of all creatures after the Prophet, is 'Alī, the prince (*amīr*) of the faithful. Then comes his elder son and successor, Ḥasan, then Ḥusayn and so on down the line to the twelfth *Imām*, the *Mahdī*.²

Ḥasan may be officially superior to his younger brother, Ḥusayn, on the basis of age and hence priority of office, but even a cursory reading of *Shī'ī* sources would show Ḥusayn to be much nearer to the hearts of devotees than his brother. This view may be supported by many *Shī'ī* as well as *Sunnī* traditions. Thus al-Khawārizmī, a famous *Sunnī* traditionist, relates a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet concerning 'Alī and his two sons which describes Ḥusayn as follows: ' . . . Verily Ḥusayn is one of the gates of the Garden. He who obstinately opposes him, God will deprive of the orders of paradise.'³ The two brothers, however, are both regarded by tradition as 'the two masters of the youths of paradise', having been thus designated by the Prophet himself.⁴ The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, interpreting this epithet in much broader terms, said, 'Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the two masters of the youths of paradise. . . .', then added, ' . . . all the inhabitants of paradise are youths, therefore to them [i.e., Ḥasan and Ḥusayn] belong the imamate in this world and lordship in the next'.⁵

Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī begins his account of Ḥusayn's life with a *ḥadīth* attributed to his older brother which reads, 'For Ḥusayn was an *imām* before he was created [born] and had read sacred revelation (*wahī*) before he could speak.'⁶ The author then comments on the *ḥadīth* and applies it to all the *imāms*: ' . . . this refers to him [Ḥusayn] when still in the realm of spirits and the womb. . . . It is because the sacred spirits of the *imāms*, before their union with their

sacred bodies, possessed all branches of religious knowledge and were teachers of the angels.⁷

In this chapter we shall first examine a few of the traditions related to Ḥusayn's conception and birth. Then, we shall follow him from his early youth with the Prophet through manhood to the beginning of the events leading to his martyrdom. The purpose of this chapter is not to present a biography of *Imām* Ḥusayn, but rather to examine certain aspects of his life necessary for the understanding of the unique place he has occupied in *Shī'ī* piety. This will be done through an investigation of some of the hagiographical traditions concerning his life and character. It must be borne in mind that we are concerned with Ḥusayn as martyr; hence this chapter will deal with a few of the many traditions that predict his tragic end. The tragedy of Karbalā' appears at every step of the *Imām's* life, from his birth, or even prior to it, until his death. In fact, in looking at the various stages of his life, we are viewing a moving prelude to the final drama of suffering, martyrdom and the humiliating captivity of the surviving members, all women and children, of his family.

3.1 ḤUSAYN'S BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

The stories which depict the birth of Ḥusayn reveal all the characteristics of the divine child as spiritual and temporal hero. His birth and destiny were foretold to the Prophet in a special message from God through Gabriel, the angel of revelation. We are told by Ibn Qawlawayh (d. 367/977) that Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, 'O, Muḥammad, thy Lord sends thee greetings (*salām*) and informs thee that a child shall be born to thee from Fāṭimah who shall be slain by thy community (*ummah*) after thee.' The Prophet answered, 'O Gabriel, peace be upon my Lord, I have no need of a child that shall be born from Fāṭimah and whom my community will slay after me.' Gabriel went up to heaven and returned to the Prophet, repeating the same message three times. The third time he added, '. . . He [God] informs thee that He shall keep the imamate, *walāyah* and *waṣīyyah* [vicegerency] in the progeny of Ḥusayn.' To that the Prophet replied, 'I consent.' When the Prophet sent a message to his daughter telling her

of the divine decree for the expected child, she at first gave the same negative answer. When she was told of his election as the father of the *imāms*, however, she likewise gave her consent. Yet she grieved for him even before she gave him birth. Thus the author tells us, citing the words of the Qur'ān, 'And his mother bore him with grief and gave birth to him with grief.'⁸ Commenting on the rest of the verse, the author said, '. . . had he [Ḥusayn] said, "make my seed righteous", then all his descendants would have been *imāms*.'⁹

The nativity of Ḥusayn as depicted by most writers, even very early ones, shows clearly his supernatural character. Many agree that, like Jesus, he was in the womb for only six months. The author of *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*,¹⁰ wishing to portray this miracle with full impact, states that when Ḥasan was born his mother was clean and pure, untouched by the impurities of women when giving birth. He further asserts that Fāṭimah conceived Ḥusayn on that same day. The fact that this openly contradicts his later statement dating the birth of the two brothers almost a year apart does not seem to bother him. Again wishing to emphasize the continuity of the *imāms* from the Prophet, he observes that the birth of Ḥusayn was like that of the Apostle of God and the two *Imāms*, 'Alī his father and Ḥasan his brother.'¹¹ This similarity between the conception and birth of the *Imām* and the Prophet is described most dramatically in a late work by Baḥrānī, *Maqṭal al-'Awālim*. It bears a close resemblance to the hagiographical nativity stories of the Prophet which no doubt it presupposes.¹²

The author attributes his account of the birth of Ḥusayn to Fāṭimah herself, who told of his conception to one of the companions of the Prophet. Prior to her pregnancy, the Prophet said, 'I see a light shining from your face; thus you shall give birth to a Proof (*ḥujjah*) of God over this creation.'¹³ After one month of her confinement, she fell ill with a fever. The Apostle of God called for a pitcher of water over which he uttered words which she did not understand, spat in the water, and gave her to drink. Immediately she recovered. After forty days, and until the end of the second month, she felt in her back, between her skin and her garment, something like the crawling of ants and thereafter she felt the child move in her womb. At no time did she feel either hungry or thirsty, but rather as if she were constantly satiated with milk and honey. During her third month, she found an

increase of blessing and bounty (*khayr*) in her house. From then on she never left her prayer chamber, and God granted her comfort and peace through the child in her loneliness. After the sixth month, she had no need of a lamp on the darkest night. When she was alone, she used to hear the voice of the child praising God in her womb. She increased in happiness and physical strength.

On the ninth day of the seventh month, an angel came to Fāṭimah while she slept and touched her on the back with his wings. She awoke frightened and astonished, made her ablutions, prayed two *rak'ahs* and went back to sleep. Another angel came to her, at her head, and blew in her face and on her neck. She awoke more afraid than before, made her ablutions again, and prayed four *rak'ahs*. After a short sleep, a third angel came to her, sat her up while reciting special formulas over her for protection against evil, and recited the two *sūrahs* of refuge.¹⁴

The next day, Fāṭimah went to her father in the house of Umm Salamah, his favorite wife, and related to him the events of the night before. He met her with signs of joy visible in his countenance and identified for her the mysterious personages. The first, he said, was 'Izrā'il, the angel of death, who is also charged with wombs of women. The second was Mikhā'il (Michael), the angel charged to watch over the wombs of the women of the Holy Family, *ahl al-bayt*. Then the Prophet asked, 'Did he blow [i.e., in her face]?' 'Yes', she answered. He embraced her and wept, then told her that the third was the angel Gabriel who would serve the newborn child.¹⁵

This legend contains elements common to the birth stories of many great religious figures from the Buddha to Samuel, Jesus and Muḥammad. The similarities with the story of Christ, as related in the Gospels, are especially striking. Both the Virgin Mary and Fāṭimah were visited by angels who comforted them. Echoing the Qur'anic narrative of the nativity of Christ, this story tells us that Fāṭimah retreated from all human contact during her confinement, and, like the Virgin, was provided with special heavenly sustenance. A white dove entered Fāṭimah's garment at the house of Umm Salamah before her meeting with the Prophet, perhaps echoing a later event in the life of Christ: the appearance of the dove at his baptism.¹⁶

It is an accepted historical fact that 'Alī grew up with the Prophet and, when still a youth, accepted Islām and stood by the Prophet

during the difficult days in Mecca before his migration (*hijrah*) to Medina. In a touching tradition generally told as an interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse¹⁷ commanding the Prophet to warn the members of his clan, his nearest of kin, he gathered together his close relatives and the few Muslims of Mecca to establish a pact of brotherhood among them. 'Alī, who was present, was left out of this pact. Despondently, he asked, 'And I, O Apostle of God?' The Prophet answered, 'Are you not content to be unto me as Hārūn [Aaron] was to Mūsā [Moses], except that after me there will be no other prophets?'¹⁸ Thus as Aaron was the vicegerent (*waṣī*) or representative (*khalīfah*) and brother to Moses, so was 'Alī to Muḥammad.

Authoritative *Shī'ī* sources relate this tradition of the naming of the two children of 'Alī.¹⁹ Thus, when Ḥasan was born, the Prophet came to 'Alī and asked, 'What have you named my child?' 'Alī answered, 'I would not precede you in this task, O Apostle of God, but I would have liked to name him Ḥarb.' The Prophet then told him that Gabriel had come to him, announced the birth of the child, and delivered the divine message that since 'Alī was to him as Aaron was to Moses, he should name his son after Aaron's son. The Prophet asked what Aaron's son was called and the angel answered, 'Shabīr'. Muḥammad protested, however, that his tongue was Arabic, so the angel merely translated the Hebrew 'Shabīr' into the Arabic 'al-Ḥasan' and bade him give the child that name. Similarly, when Ḥusayn was born, the angel came with the divine command that he be called Shubayr, the diminutive of Shabīr. Again the Prophet protested that his tongue was Arabic; the child was then given the name al-Ḥusayn, the diminutive of al-Ḥasan. This story expresses well the *Shī'ī* concept of prophethood and imamate.²⁰

For every prophet, God appointed a vicegerent (*waṣī*) and successor (*khalīfah*) as well as eleven others who succeeded the first *Imām*, or vicegerent: altogether twelve *imāms*.²¹ The first *waṣī* of Adam was Seth; that of Abraham, Ishmael; of Moses, Aaron and of Jesus, Sham'un (Simon Peter). Moses, the lawgiver *par excellence*, was, like Muḥammad, the political head of a community; his first *waṣī* was his brother, Aaron. 'Alī, the cousin and son-in-law of the last Prophet Muḥammad, was also to him like a brother, for Abū Ṭālib, 'Alī's father, took the Prophet into his care when Muḥammad was yet a

child, orphaned by the early death of both his parents. Ibn Shahrāshūb, the author of *al-Manāqib*, argues that God kept the imamate in the progeny of Ḥusayn, as he did the prophethood in that of Aaron. The proof of this, the author argues, is that in God's Word it is written, 'Whosoever is slain unjustly, we have appointed to his next of kin authority; but let him not exceed in slaying; he shall be helped.'²² The author then added, 'Surely 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, was most deserving of the claim to his father's blood and was alone worthy of demanding its recompense.'²³

Ḥusayn was born on the fifth of Sha'bān in the fourth year of the Hijrah, the year of the Trench.²⁴ According to Shaykh al-Mufīd, the author of *al-Irshād*, one of the earliest and most authoritative works on the lives of the *imāms*, when Ḥusayn was born the Prophet came and took him in his arms with great joy, and, as already observed, gave him the name al-Ḥusayn. He then shaved the child's hair, gave its weight in silver in alms, and performed the *'aqīqah* (sacrifice) as was the custom of the time.²⁵ Al-Mufīd relates relatively few of the many traditions connected with the birth of Ḥusayn, without, however, denying the supernatural character of the child or the events leading to his birth. The shaykh was more interested in asserting the imamate of the two children of 'Alī and the descendants of Ḥusayn; therefore whatever of the miraculous or extraordinary he cites in this connection, he does so only in proof of this important *Shī'ī* doctrine.

We are told that before the birth of Ḥusayn, Umm al-Faḍl²⁶ dreamt that a piece of the Prophet's flesh, or one of his members, was cut off and thrown in her lap. Frightened by the dream, she told it to the Prophet who interpreted it for her with joy announcing the birth to Fāṭimah of a child who would be put in her lap to be nursed. Such portents of the birth of a hero, prophet or saint are of course familiar in the history of religion, but this one has a very specific purpose. It is intended to portray the close relationship of the *Imām* to the Prophet, an emphasis to which we shall have shortly to return.

In later, and more popular, sources,²⁷ we are told that when Ḥusayn was born, God ordered Riḍwān, the keeper of the Gardens of Paradise, to adorn paradise, and Mālik, the keeper of hell, to diminish its flames because a child was born to Muḥammad. God ordered, moreover, the houris to adorn themselves with the best of garments and precious

stones to visit one another and rejoice for the birth of the child. The tree Ṭūbā²⁸ was commanded to scatter its fruits of precious stones and life-giving, healing leaves all about like rain. The angels, houris and youths of paradise were allowed to gather all that wealth in honor of this great festive occasion. Then God sent down Lu'ayyah, the most beautiful of all the houris, to be the midwife to Fāṭimah. She washed the child with the waters of paradise and rubbed his gums with her spittle as did also the angel Gabriel. Ḥusayn, like all the *imāms*, was born clean; this was asserted in quite early works. Thus we are told that Ṣafīyyah, the daughter of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, was the midwife who delivered the child while the Prophet waited impatiently outside. As soon as the child was born, the Prophet called out, 'O aunt, give me my son.' She, however, protested, saying, 'O Apostle of God, we have not yet cleaned him.' He retorted, 'You clean him! Nay, God Himself has cleansed and purified him.'²⁹ It is possible that this retort was meant metaphorically, but traditions like this could in all probability have provided the basis for many hagiographical tales. Some zealous writers have gone so far as to say that the Prophet himself acted as the midwife at the birth of Ḥusayn, and to describe on the authority of one or another of the companions how his hands were thoroughly stained with the blood of childbirth.³⁰

We have already observed that Ḥusayn's martyrdom gave his descendants the right to claim his own blood as well as his high station. Ibn Shahrāshūb, whom we cited in proof of this idea, asserts that the Prophet suckled Ḥusayn himself by putting his thumb or tongue into the child's mouth; which became for the child a source of nourishment. This the Prophet did immediately after the child's birth, forbidding his mother to nurse him herself and continuing thus to feed the suckling infant for forty days. We are also told that before Ḥasan was born, the Prophet came to his daughter and said, 'You shall give birth to a male child for whom Gabriel has offered me congratulations. Do not suckle him until I return.' Then he went on a short journey. When he returned he reproached her saying, 'What have you done?!' She answered that her maternal instinct would not allow her to see him cry of hunger. With sad resignation, he said, 'Thus God willed to do only that which He had decreed.'³¹

Just before the birth of Ḥusayn, the Prophet came again to Fāṭimah

and ordered her not to suckle the child no matter how long she would have to wait for his return. When he returned from a three-day journey, he found the child still unfed, the mother anxiously waiting for his return. He put his tongue into the boy's mouth, who began to suck on it hungrily, and repeated twice, 'O Ḥusayn! So God would not have it except as He willed. It shall be [i.e., the imamate] in your progeny until the Day of Resurrection.'³² Ibn Shahrāshūb relates this tradition in proof of the imamate of Ḥusayn in the chapter dealing with Ḥusayn's miracles; the miracle in this case was that Ḥusayn was nourished through divine providence and the flesh and blood of the Prophet. The author declares, '... thus his [i.e., Ḥusayn's] flesh and blood grew out of the flesh and blood of the Apostle of God'.³³ We saw in the last chapter that the Prophet and the *imāms* were created of a special divine light before all creation. Here Ḥusayn's special constitution is emphasized, his physical substance closely connected to that of the Prophet, thus claiming for him still greater sanctity and honor.

As we shall see below, many stories tell of the coming of angels to congratulate the Prophet on the birth of Ḥusayn. Reluctantly, they had to tell him of what was to befall the newborn child at the hands of wicked men after the Prophet's death. According to a curious tradition related by Ibn Qawlawayh on the authority of the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, God Himself was the first to offer His blessings, congratulations and condolences to Muḥammad. As the Prophet was sitting one day in the house of his daughter, Fāṭimah, he suddenly fell on his face sobbing. Then sitting up again, he took the child, pressed him closely to his breast and said:

O Fāṭimah, daughter of Muḥammad, verily the Most High has appeared to me, in your house at this hour, in the best appearance and most beautiful form. He then said to me, 'O Muḥammad, do you love Ḥusayn?' 'Yes!,' said I. 'He is the comfort of my eye, the beloved [literally fruit] of my inward heart (*fu'ād*) and the flesh that is between my two eyes.'³⁴ Then God, while putting his hand on the head of Ḥusayn, said to me, 'O Muḥammad, how greatly blessed is this child, for upon him are my blessings, my mercy, my prayers and good pleasures (*raḍawāt*). My curse and wrath, torment and disgrace shall be for those who will fight against him, stand up

against him or oppose him. For verily, he is the master of all martyrs, those who have gone before and those that are yet to come in this world and the next.³⁵

We are told that when Ḥusayn was born, God sent Gabriel with a thousand legions (*qabil*) of angels to share the Prophet's joy for the birth of his grandson and to offer their condolences for the child's impending tragedy. The party of angels was stopped on the way by an angel named Fuṭrus³⁶ who was imprisoned on a lonely island for an offence he had committed. He had been sent on a mission but had tarried in its execution, for which God had punished him by breaking his wings and throwing him on that island a thousand years before the birth of Ḥusayn.³⁷ Fuṭrus begged the angels to carry him with them, asking the Prophet to intercede on his behalf. The Prophet did so, ordering the angel to rub his broken wings on the wrappings of the infant. In this way, his wings were restored to him. God, however, did not return the forgiven angel back to heaven where he had been one of the bearers of the throne,³⁸ but ordered him to guard the tomb of Ḥusayn and give glad tidings to his pilgrims of their high degree in paradise. Fuṭrus, the tale goes on, boasts in heaven, saying 'Who is like me when I am the freedman of Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī?'³⁹

Other angels came at various times to the Prophet to visit him and offer their condolences for the tragic death destined for his beloved child. One of these, a great angel whose head reached heaven, came down and stood in the sea where he raised the lament for all creatures to hear, ordering them to don garments of mourning because the son of the beloved of God, Muḥammad, would be slain. The angel is said to have then come and reported the sad news to the Prophet. On his return to heaven, he took some of the soil of Karbalā' on the tip of his wing for all the hosts of heaven to smell and receive its blessings or *barakah*.⁴⁰ Gabriel came often with the sorrowful news, as did the angel of rain; in every case, the angel would show the Prophet the spot where Ḥusayn was to be killed and give him a handful of its soil. All such angelic visits took place when the Prophet was in the house of Umm Salamah, to whom he gave the sacred soil, telling her to keep it as a sign of Ḥusayn's death; she would know that Ḥusayn had been killed when the soil turned into congealed blood.

One final event in the dramatic story of the birth and infancy of Ḥusayn deserves mention. When the child was a year old, twelve angels of diverse appearance came down to the Prophet. One was like a lion, another like a dragon, the third like an ox and the fourth had the appearance of a man. The other eight resembled one or another of the animal species.⁴¹ They came down sorrowful with red faces (a sign of anger) and outspread wings, and announced to the Prophet, 'O Muḥammad, there will befall your child Ḥusayn what befell Hābīl [Abel] at the hands of Qābīl [Cain]; and he shall receive a good reward like that of Abel, and his murderer will bear the same heavy burden of sin and punishment as did Cain.'⁴²

Such stories, portraying the sorrow of the Prophet here on earth shared by all creation including the angelic realm, are meant, like all hagiographic tales, to inflame the emotions of the audience of the *ta'zīyah* and increase their participation in the event. Al-Khawārizmī tells us, in the same context as the story just related, that when an angel sought permission of God to pay a visit to the Prophet, he was commanded to announce again the sad news to him. He protested that he was elated with the opportunity to greet Muḥammad, but now his joy was disturbed by having to be the messenger of ill omen. Nonetheless, he obeyed the divine command, and Prophet and angel shed bitter tears.⁴³ The angel in this story mentions the murderer of Ḥusayn by name: Yazīd, who was to kill the son of Fāṭimah, the pure one, who is like the Virgin Mary, daughter of 'Imrān.⁴⁴

It is often difficult to determine whether an author meant to relate different traditions of such angelic visits, or to present variants of the same one. Gabriel, for instance, is often mentioned by the same author as coming down in different contexts and on different occasions expressly to announce to Muḥammad the murder of his grandson. One cannot help asking why the Prophet needed to be reminded so often of what he knew even before the child was born. Again, the aim is clearly not to write an historical narrative in any sense of the word, but rather to portray a tragic scene. Even in heaven, on the night of the Prophet's ascension (*mī'rāj*), he saw signs of the tragic end of both his grandsons: two beautiful palaces each made of a single pearl, one red and the other green. When he asked to whom these magnificent abodes belonged, he was told that the red was for Ḥusayn

and the green for Ḥasan, the colors of blood and poison respectively.⁴⁵

Shī'ī as well as *Sunnī* tradition generally asserts that the Prophet loved his two grandchildren with a love that knew no limits. We have already noted⁴⁶ the deep and highly emotional intimacy which existed between the Prophet and the people of his household. All *Shī'ī* authorities advance this love as incontrovertible proof of the imamate of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The *imāms* are the elect of God; the Prophet loved them, as does God. Consequently, those whom God and His Prophet love, all creatures, especially men, are enjoined to love also. It is related that the Prophet prayed one day while the two children were in his arms, 'O God, I love them: do Thou love them also, and love those who show love for them.'⁴⁷ This prayer is related on the authority of Salmān, the Persian, with yet another tradition which expresses clearly the theological implications of this love. The Prophet said, 'He who loves Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, I love him; he whom I love, God loves also; and he whom God loves, him He causes to enter paradise. But he who hates them, I hate; and he whom I hate, God hates; and he whom God hates, him He causes to enter into the fire.'⁴⁸

These passages point to the fact that love for the two *imāms* is closely linked for the *Shī'ī* community with love for God and His Apostle. In the interpretation of the famous Qur'ānic verse of the *mubāhalah* (prayer of invocation),⁴⁹ *Shī'ī* theology of the *imāms* goes a step further and identifies the Holy Family with the Prophet in a very direct way. The words 'our selves' are said to refer to 'Alī and the Prophet, 'our women' to Fāṭimah and 'our sons' to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.⁵⁰ *Shī'ī* authors relate the story of the challenge of the Prophet to the Christians of Najrān, stressing the role of the Holy Family in that encounter. The Christians at first agreed to hold the *mubāhalah* on the appointed day, their bishop counselling them, saying 'If he [Muḥammad] comes to us with his companions, we would fear no harm, but if he brings his family, then we should not hold the *mubāhalah*.'⁵¹ When they saw the Prophet kneel, with 'Alī, Fāṭimah and their two children surrounding him, the bishop exclaimed, 'By God behold Muḥammad kneeling as did the prophets before him.'⁵² Then in fear and awe, they requested to be excused from the *mubāhalah* and accepted to pay a large tribute; some of them even embraced Islām.

Many traditions show how anxious the Prophet was lest any harm should befall his two dear children and how preoccupied he was with insuring their comfort and well-being. One genre of hagiographic tales, showing this anxiety of the Prophet for Ḥasan and Ḥusayn in a very sentimental and touching way, relates in differing versions how one or both of them was temporarily lost. Usually their mother missed them and would run to her father for help. Then the Prophet and his companions would go looking for the children, finally found asleep in each other's arms in the garden of a rich Jew of Medina. An animal, often a serpent, would be watching over them. The Prophet converses with the creature, who finally delivers to him its precious charge, uttering divine praises, bearing witness to the apostleship of Muḥammad, and telling of the immediate reward it had received from God for this good deed.⁵³

One of these tales, related on the authority of the sixth *Imām*, combines several important elements of folklore, even hints at 'Ā'ishah's neglect of the children. Although it is customary in *Shī'ī* tradition that a story concerning the Prophet and his family takes place in the house of Umm Salamah, this tradition shows the Prophet at the home of 'Ā'ishah, suffering an illness. His daughter and her two children came to see him, but he was asleep. Finally the mother left while the two children, each lying on one arm of the Prophet, also fell asleep. They woke up before he did and started for home. It was a dark rainy night, and the children lost their way. They strayed into a garden belonging to the Jewish tribe of Banī al-Najjār. The Prophet woke up visibly alarmed at not finding them beside him. He went out looking for them, and a light shone guiding him to the spot where they had decided to sleep until morning. It had rained all around them except on the spot where they lay, for a huge and fearful serpent, with hairs like bamboo shoots, stood over the two children and covered each of them with one of its two large wings. Fearing that the serpent would do the children harm, the Prophet advanced hurriedly and cleared his throat in order to alert the serpent and scare it away. But when it noticed him, the serpent crawled away from the children, saying, 'O God I call Thee and Thy angels to witness that these are the two young lions [children] of Thy Prophet. I have faithfully watched over them and now I return them to him, safe and sound.'⁵⁴

The serpent then told the Prophet that he was one of the *jinn* of Nisibīn (Nisibus), whose people had forgotten a verse of the Qur'ān. He had been sent to learn it again from the Prophet, but as he reached that spot he heard a voice saying, 'O you serpent, these are the two lions of the Apostle. Keep them from all perils, and from any evil happenings of the day or night.'⁵⁵ Thus the Prophet reminded the *jinn*-serpent of the verse; then he carried the children home on his shoulders with a gladdened heart.

This love of the Prophet for the two youthful *imāms* is portrayed in a variety of ways by historians as well as hagiographers, *Shī'īs* as well as *Sunnīs*. They tell of how, when the Prophet prostrated himself in prayer and the two children jumped on his back, he would prolong his prostration until they voluntarily climbed down; of how he used to play with them using all the endearments of a father for his own children. Often he would be in the mosque delivering an important sermon and the children would come tripping in. He would interrupt his speech, leave his pulpit, and bring them up to him.⁵⁶

The love of the angels for the two *imāms* is shown in the many traditions telling of how, when Ḥusayn cried in the cradle and his mother was too tired to wake up to his crying, an angel would come down to quiet him and play with him. In fact, we are often told that the angels cried for Ḥusayn's baby tears. Whenever the Prophet heard him crying, he would order the nurse to quiet him, reproachfully exclaiming, 'Have I not told you that his crying hurts me.'⁵⁷

One final tradition, which is told by many authors with richly embellished variations, deserves brief mention here for the connection it makes between the love of the Prophet for the two children and the cruel martyrdom of Ḥusayn. The two children were wrestling together one day, and the Prophet was cheering Ḥasan on. Fāṭimah protested that he was actually taking the side of the older over the younger. He replied, however, that Gabriel himself was cheering on Ḥusayn. When neither of the two children could prevail over the other, they asked the Prophet to judge as to who was the stronger. But he, not wishing to hurt the feelings of either of them, suggested that they write something, and the one with the better handwriting would be the stronger. Again, not wishing to make a judgment, he told them that he was an illiterate Prophet and that they had better go to

their father. The father, however, wishing to avoid deciding for the one over the other, sent them to their mother. She then decided that she would scatter a necklace of pearls she had around her neck, and whoever could collect the larger number of pearls would be the stronger. Each of the two collected an equal number with one extra pearl left, over which they began to fight. Gabriel, like their parents and grandfather, not wishing to break the heart of either of them, struck the extra pearl with his wing, dividing it in two. So each child picked up one half, thus they were judged equal and the problem was solved.

This story occurs in most of our sources.⁵⁸ In later sources it is used to contrast the Prophet's love for the *imāms* with the suffering and martyrdom they later endured under Umayyad rulers. The story is told to Yazīd by a Christian, who was supposed to have witnessed the event and reproached the heartless ruler for his cruelty toward Ḥusayn. The head of Ḥusayn was at the time before Yazīd, having been brought from Karbalā'. The Christian professed Islām, embraced the *Imām's* head and was martyred by Yazīd.⁵⁹

That the *Imāms* are the true and only successors of the Prophet is supported by *Shī'ī* authorities with the argument that Ḥusayn was ransomed with the life of Ibrahīm, the only male child born to the Prophet. Perhaps the most interesting interpretation of this event in a clearly redemptive sense is the one given by the author of *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*. He tells us that when Ibrahīm fell ill, the Prophet grieved sorely for him. In other sources we are told that the Prophet had both his son and Ḥusayn on his lap when the angel Gabriel came to him, requiring that he choose one of the two, since God did not wish him to have them both. He chose the life of Ḥusayn over that of his son, who immediately fell ill and died three days later.⁶⁰

According to *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, the angel Gabriel came to the Prophet with the divine message, saying:

The Lord sends you His peace and salutation, and says, 'You either choose the life of your son, Ibrahīm, and he will be granted life and the inheritance of prophethood after you. Then your entire community will take part in killing him, and I would send them all to the fire. Or, you choose Ḥusayn your grandson (*sibt*); he will live and I

will make him an *imām* after you. Half of your community will then take part in his killing [some actually murdering him, some helping others against him, some abandoning him] and I will send only those people to the fire.'

The Prophet answered, 'I prefer that my entire community should be sent to the fire and that Ḥusayn live rather than Fāṭimah having to grieve for his loss.'⁶¹ Thus the Prophet used to embrace Ḥusayn and exclaim, 'May I be a ransom for him whom I ransomed with my own son Ibrāhīm.'⁶² The redemptive implication of the story is twofold. Ḥusayn himself is ransomed by one who would have been a prophet, had he lived, and Ḥusayn, in turn, redeems at least half the community by his own life and death.

This tradition comes close to being a doctrinal one; but in the end it fails in this purpose. The author intends to show that both God and the Prophet chose the imamate to succeed prophethood; for had Ibrāhīm lived, he would have been a prophet. Yet the author in the end chooses to reiterate the popular notion, common to all other authors, that this event proves even further the love of the Prophet for Ḥusayn, even over his own child. In fact, the story, as told by most authors, is less than edifying. The Prophet is made to rationalize his choice on the grounds that if his son dies, his mother, who was Mārīyah, the Copt, would grieve, but that does not matter since she is only a servant. He himself could patiently bear the loss. On the other hand, the death of Ḥusayn would grieve Fāṭimah, 'Alī, Ḥasan and himself, and he did not wish them all to grieve. It is interesting that no author argues simply for the pure love of the Prophet for Ḥusayn, but rather they all look for a motive in some way external to the relationship between the Prophet and the *Imām*.

The question of the continuation of the imamate in the descendants of Ḥusayn, and indeed of the imamate altogether, provoked much dispute in the early Muslim community. That this went on well into the sixth century of the *hijrah* is clear from the fact that one cannot speak categorically of one or even two distinct claims for the imamate by one or two descendants of 'Alī. The following *ḥadīth*, quoted by the well known *Sunnī* traditionist, al-Khawārizmī, is a clear statement in support of the imamate of Ḥusayn and his descendants. It is quoted on

the authority of Salmān the Persian, in itself an interesting fact, since Salmān has been regarded as the father of much *Shī'ī* thought and tradition. One day the Prophet held Ḥusayn in his lap kissing him and saying, 'You are a master (*sayyid*), the son of a master and father of masters. You are an *imām*, son of an *imām*, and father of *imāms*. You are a *ḥujjah* [divine proof over all creation], the son of a *ḥujjah*, and father of *ḥujaj* [plural of *ḥujjah*]. Nine [*imāms*] shall proceed from your loins (*ṣalb*), the ninth shall be their *qā'im* [i.e., the *Mahdī*].'⁶³

Shī'ī tradition has always insisted that the imamate cannot be established through human choice, or any such arbitrary decision.⁶⁴ It is rather an inheritance, divinely instituted, from the Prophet to 'Alī, and from him to his firstborn, al-Ḥasan, and then to al-Ḥusayn. But after the third *Imām*, Ḥusayn, disagreement arose even within the young *Shī'ī* community as to whether the imamate should continue on among the children of 'Alī, passing on to the next brother in line, or remain among the progeny of Ḥusayn. We need not enter into the intricacies of this dispute. The materials discussed so far furnish ample evidence from the Twelver *Shī'ī* point of view for the latter position. It is important, however, to discuss briefly the will (*waṣīyyah*) of Ḥasan to his brother Ibn al-Hanafīyyah, the other contender for this office. This document, or rather conversation, between the two brothers portrays well the Twelver *Shī'ī* attitude toward the other members of the family of 'Alī, for the case of Ibn al-Hanafīyyah may be taken as typical. It puts in his mouth a glowing tribute to his martyred brother and a clear recognition of his authority as the *Imām* after the death of Ḥasan.

On his deathbed, Ḥasan called for his brother Ibn al-Hanafīyyah in order to give him final words of warning against having any feeling of envy or jealousy towards Ḥusayn. He warned his brother against claiming for himself the right of Ḥusayn to the imamate after the death of Ḥasan. Ḥasan said, 'O Muḥammad [Ibn al-Hanafīyyah], do you not know that Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī is the *Imām* after my death . . .? For it is so decreed by God in the foregoing Book [the Qur'ān], an inheritance from the Prophet vouchsafed him by God as a gift after his father and mother. Verily God knew that you, the Holy Family, are His elect among His creatures. Thus He chose from among you Muḥammad, who chose 'Alī, and 'Alī chose me for the imamate and I chose

Ḥusayn.⁶⁵ Ibn al-Hanafīyyah concurred with his brother's words. After praising him, he said of Ḥusayn, 'Truly Ḥusayn is the most knowing and wise of us and the nearest of kin to the Apostle of God.' He then repeated the words of Ḥasan concerning the election of the Holy Family and concluded, 'We submit therefore and accept him [i.e., Ḥusayn] in whom is manifested the pleasure [i.e., of God], him through whom we shall be saved from all hardships (*mushkilāt*).'⁶⁶

3.2 ḤUSAYN'S VIRTUES AND LATER YEARS

Islāmic tradition in general asserts clearly that Ḥusayn was possessed of great knowledge (*ilm*), wisdom and compassion (*ḥilm*), courage and exemplary piety. By knowledge is meant prophetic and religious knowledge. It is this prophetic knowledge, the knowledge (*ilm*) of the Book (*kitāb*), that enables the prophets and *imāms* to perform miracles, knowledge itself being regarded as a great miracle.

We are told that al-Aṣḡagh Ibn Nabātah, a prominent follower of 'Alī, the first *Imām*, and his two sons, asked Ḥusayn to reveal to him one of the hidden secrets of God. He meant, of course, the manifestation of a sign or miracle. The *Imām*, knowing what was in his heart, asked him if he wished to see him conversing with the Apostle of God in one of the mosques of Kūfah. Immediately the two of them found themselves in Kūfah, transported thither from Medina. The Prophet and 'Alī appeared, conversed with Ḥusayn awhile, then carried him up with them to paradise. Ḥusayn returned to earth and smiled, saying, 'O Aṣḡagh, to Sulaymān [Solomon] was given the wind in its going and coming,⁶⁷ for the distance of a month's journey, but I was granted greater things than those to Sulaymān.' After a long discourse on the virtues of the Holy Family, Ḥusayn continued, 'We are those who possess the knowledge of the Book and the elucidation of what is contained therein. . . .'⁶⁸

As a child, Ḥusayn foretold his own martyrdom and that Ibn Sa'd was to lead the armies of the Umayyads against him. When the Prophet was asked if he had told this to Ḥusayn, he replied, 'No, his knowledge is my knowledge, and my knowledge is his, for we know of the occurrence of events before they occur.'⁶⁹

Like prophets, the *imāms* are given the power of miracles as proof of their imamate. Yet the miracles attributed to *Imām* Ḥusayn are, for the most part, meant to assert not only his supernatural power and favor with God, but his great knowledge and wisdom as well. A few examples will suffice to show these special characteristics of his miraculous powers.

Two men came to Ḥusayn with a woman and her child, each man claiming the child to be his own. The woman favored the claim of one over the other, but still the matter seemed insoluble. Ḥusayn faced the *qiblah*, muttered a few words of prayer that no one understood, then addressed the suckling baby with the command, 'Speak by God's permission and tell the truth.' The baby said that he was the child of neither of the men but of a certain shepherd, gave his name and whereabouts, and was silent again.⁷⁰

Another time, a young man came to *Imām* Ḥusayn in tears, saying that his mother, a woman of considerable wealth, had died without making a will. Ḥusayn said to his companions, 'Let us go to see this upright [literally, *free*] woman'. He went and sat at her head and prayed that she be revived in order to utter her will. As soon as he finished praying, the dead woman sneezed and sat up. She pronounced the two *shahādahs* and greeted the *Imām* as befitted his dignity. She then stated her wishes concerning her wealth and other matters, lay down and returned to death.⁷¹

Another account tells how he cured a man suffering from a terrible fever (*ḥummah*) by commanding it to leave his body; the fever obediently left, uttering a word of submission. This last miracle is told in many of our sources, and it sounds more like magic than the saintly power of miracles. A speaking fever, acknowledging the imamate of all the *imāms* and declaring itself to be one of their followers, is too fantastic even for a miracle.⁷² Another story tells how, during the caliphate of 'Alī, the people of Kūfah once came to him complaining of the lack of rain which had threatened them and their animals with destruction. 'Alī asked Ḥusayn to rise and pray for rain.⁷³ He stood up and prayed for a long time, and no sooner had he finished his prayer than it began to rain so heavily that the neighbouring valleys overflowed with water.⁷⁴

Miracles performed by prophets, *imāms* and the pious friends of

God (*awliyā'*) are meant to prove the intimate relationship between God and His friends, as well as the favor (*karāmah*) they enjoy with Him. To be sure, this last aspect of the meaning and purpose of miracles is associated with the saints of Sufism especially. To think, however, that *karāmah* is the gift of the *Ṣūfī* saint alone is to ignore many pietistic traditions which assert that the Prophet is also a *walī*. This same term is often directly applied to the *imāms* in many important traditions. Miracles such as God providing food for prophets, *imāms* and saints, especially fruits out of season, are quite common. We have already encountered examples of these in the first chapter of this study. Another typical example is related in *Dalā'il al-Imāmah* of Ṭabarī: 'Alī al-Akbar, the eldest son of Ḥusayn, expressed a desire for grapes at a time when grapes were not in season. His father, not wishing to disappoint him, reached up to a pillar of the mosque and brought down grapes and bananas. He gave the fruits to his son, saying, 'What God has in store for his friends (*awliyā'*) is far greater than this.'⁷⁵

Ḥusayn is portrayed in both *Shī'ī* and *Sunnī* tradition as a man of deep piety, humility, generosity and wisdom. Many moving stories tell of his acts of magnanimity and generosity, all done in an attitude of humility before God, and compassion and gentleness toward men. He once saw a group of poor youths, for example, eating hard bread crumbs on the side of the road. They invited him to share their modest repast, which he did. Then he took them all to his home, fed and clothed them, and with characteristic humility commented, 'They are more generous than I am, because they gave all they had while I gave only a little of what I had.' He then recited, 'Verily, God loves not them that are proud.'⁷⁶

On another occasion, a maidservant greeted him with a fragrant flower (*rayḥān*). He replied, 'You are free for the face of God.' An old companion of the Prophet, then present, protested that she had greeted her master in a way befitting a servant. But Ḥusayn said; 'Have you not read God's words, 'When ye are greeted with a greeting, greet ye with a better one than it or return it.' The best greeting that I could offer in return for hers is to set her free.'⁷⁷

Ḥusayn's clemency may be seen in the following anecdote. One day a servant of his, we are told, incurred his anger by some mischief. Ḥusayn was about to punish him, when the servant quoted to him

words of the Qur'ān: 'Oh master, "those who restrain their rage. . . ."'. Ḥusayn answered, 'Let him go, I have controlled my rage.' The servant continued, '. . . and are forgiving toward mankind. . .'. The master said, 'We have forgiven you.' The servant then added, 'God loves the good-doers.'⁷⁸ The *Imām* replied, 'You are free for the face of God.' He then gave the servant a large gift.⁷⁹ Thus the anger of the mild and magnanimous *Imām* is seen to have been turned into generous clemency when confronted with the divine injunctions for forgiveness.

Ḥusayn's compassion and concern for the poor and destitute are attested to in an interesting observation attributed to Mu'āwīyah. This Umayyad ruler, the old enemy of 'Alī and his family, compared Ḥusayn's attitude toward wealth with that of his brother Ḥasan. Mu'āwīyah sent the two brothers rich gifts of clothes, musk and other valuable goods, remarking that al-Ḥasan would no doubt give a good share of these presents to his wives and other women, but Ḥusayn would distribute them all among the widows and orphans of the men killed in his father's wars.⁸⁰

It is further related that when Ḥusayn lay naked and headless on the sands of Karbalā', people inquired about the trace of black scars on his back. His son, 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, explained that they were the result of his father's carrying so many heavy sacks of provisions on his back to the homes of the widows and orphans of Medina, something he used to do at night to hide his good deeds from other men.⁸¹

That the *Imām* lived out dynamically in his daily life the obligations of his faith may be seen in his reply to a man inquiring why God had instituted the fast of Ramaḍān. He replied, 'God made fasting obligatory in order that the rich may feel the pain of hunger, and thus share their wealth more generously with the poor.'⁸² In one of his sermons, he said with regard to the spirit and meaning of giving, 'The needs that people bring before you are among God's favors towards you. Do not, therefore, spurn divine favors, lest they be turned into curses upon you.'⁸³ It is clear from these brief quotations of the many sayings attributed to Ḥusayn that it was much easier for him to give than to ask. He is quoted as saying, 'The man of need who spares not his face from the shame of indignity of asking you, deserves that you spare your own face the shame of refusing to grant his request.'⁸⁴

Ancient Arabian gallantry, or manliness (*munūwwah*), was a well-known virtue in Arab society before and after the establishment of Islām. The Islāmic ideal sought not to substitute religion (*dīn*) for it, as Goldziher argued,⁸⁵ but rather to temper its excesses with faith or *dīn*. This great virtue expresses itself best in the ideal of *karam*, a term expressing generosity in giving, hospitality to strangers, and the general idea of nobility of character. We have seen this ideal expressed in the wise sayings of *Imām* Ḥusayn; it remains for us to show how it is emphasized in accounts of his actual dealings with people, especially those who were total strangers to him.

A bedouin beggar stood at Ḥusayn's door while he was standing in prayer and recited the following verses:

He who comes to you shall not be turned away empty-handed from your door. For you are a generous man, a man of noble substance. Was not your father the slayer of reprobates?

Ḥusayn cut short his prayer and went to the door where he saw a man whose appearance betrayed poverty and privation. He called his servant and asked what was left of the money they had. He was told two hundred *dirhams*, which the *Imām* had directed be distributed among the members of his own family. But Ḥusayn said, 'Bring the money out, for here comes one who is more worthy of it than they are.' He then handed the money to the man, his face turned from him, and recited in answer to his verses:

Here, take this [parcel of coins] and know that I apologize to you with all sympathy and compassion. Had our means been better, our heaven would have poured upon you [i.e., we would have given to you as generously as heaven pours forth its rain]. But the fear of death [i.e., judgment after death] is a thing too terrible to bear; yet our fist has little more to give.

Gratefully, the man received the gift and went away, reciting:

Pure and unblemished are their garments [meaning persons] and prayers pour upon them wherever they may be mentioned. For with you (*ahl al-bayt*) is the Knowledge of the Book, and all that which its *sūrah*s taught. For a man to be an Alid when he recounts his lineage, can there be greater nobility than this among men?⁸⁶

Ḥusayn's gallantry and magnanimity are recounted by many historians and traditionists of early Islām.⁸⁷ Enough has been said in this chapter to demonstrate these qualities of the *Imām*. Of greater significance for our purposes, however, are the supernatural characteristics attributed to him, characteristics that are beyond human comprehension. The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, declared that knowledge of the *imāms* (or their secret [*ḥadīth*]) is too difficult to bear even for an angel near the divine throne or a prophet sent by God.⁸⁸ This statement can be understood in two ways. First, the *imāms* in their essential beings are so marvellous that information concerning them, that is, their *ḥadīth*, is of so exalted a nature that even an angel or a prophet cannot keep it to himself, but must declare it to another angel or prophet. Secondly, the mystery of the *imāms* is too great for most of mankind to bear, and therefore, it should not be declared in all its awesome aspects except to the chosen few.

This second sense is concretely expressed in the following anecdote. A group of men came one day to Ḥusayn to ask that he tell them something of the *imāms'* high favors (*faḍā'il*) with God. Ḥusayn answered by cautioning them that they would not be able to bear such knowledge if he were to disclose it to them. When they persisted, he reluctantly agreed to talk to each one of them separately. Taking one aside, he spoke to him for a few moments. Immediately, the man lost his senses and was unable to speak. The others left Ḥusayn in wonderment and terror. Of course, we are not told what the man heard, as he himself went mad, and some sources suggest that he was made to forget what he had heard.⁸⁹

It has been argued in this study that the supernatural character of the *imāms* is due mainly to the fact that they are heirs to the special knowledge and hence the authority of the prophets. In our discussion of the *imāms* in the previous chapter, we saw that their knowledge was a special gift from God, who alone knows all things. While they do not have absolute divine knowledge, the *imāms* are granted special knowledge such as the time and manner of their death.⁹⁰ Like the *imāms* before and after him, Ḥusayn knew the time and manner of his own tragic end in all its gory details. *Shī'ī* theologians and traditionists insist on this fact, and present many proofs and arguments in its support.⁹¹ When Ḥusayn decided to journey to Iraq, Umm

Salamah is said to have sent for him, seeking to dissuade him from his journey by reminding him of all that the Prophet had told her regarding him. If he went to Iraq, she warned, he would surely be killed. Husayn, however, answered:

By God, O mother, I shall be killed without any doubt. There is no escape from the predestined decree of God; there is no escape for me from death. Indeed, I know the day and hour, and the spot wherein I shall be killed. I know the place whereon I shall fall, and the spot in which I shall be buried, as I know you. If you wish that I show you my resting place and that of the men who will be martyred with me, I will.⁹²

Then he prayed, invoking the great name of God. The earth began to sink down until he showed her his burial place and that of his companions. Then he gave her some of the soil of Karbalā', which she mixed with the soil the Prophet had given her when Husayn was yet a child, telling her to watch for the tenth of Muḥarram, the day of 'Āshūrā', when he would be killed after the afternoon prayers.⁹³

Like many martyrs before and after him, *Imām* Husayn has been generally considered by Islāmic tradition to be a sacred sacrifice offered on the altar of truth, the truth that continues to guide human history to its ultimate fulfillment in accordance with the will and plan of God. He, like all true martyrs 'in the way of God', faced his struggle with death with courage, piety and confidence. Yet this assurance was often overshadowed by the sorrow and tears of a human person who loved life and feared death. In what is generally considered his last speech, his parting words to the people of Medina, we see some of the depth of those human feelings expressed in the context of submission to the unalterable Divine Will, acceptance of the divine decree, and a plea for his friends to share this painful yet glorious ordeal.

Death has been traced [i.e., prescribed] for the sons of Adam, as the tracing of the necklace around the neck of a young maiden. How great is my longing for my forebears, it is as the longing of Jacob for Joseph. A martyrdom was decreed for me, which I shall soon meet. I see my limbs [or, perhaps entrails] cut off and devoured by the

beasts of the wilderness on the plain of Karbalā'. They shall fill of me their empty stomachs. . . . There is no escape from a day decreed by the writ of the pen.⁹⁴

After these words and the despair-filled submission they express, Ḥusayn went on to affirm his trust and grateful acceptance of the divine will, identifying the pleasure of the Holy Family with that of God.

God's pleasure is our pleasure, we people of the House (*ahl al-bayt*), we bear His afflictions patiently and He repays us with the rewards of those who are patient. Verily, the flesh of the Apostle of God [meaning his family] shall never be separated from him. Rather, it shall be gathered together for him in the precincts of sanctity (*ḥaḍīrat al-quds*). There, in the Gardens of Paradise (*jinān*) shall his eyes be consoled in them, and God shall fulfill His promises to them.⁹⁵

With these words of assurance, the *Imām* then invited his hearers to join him, challenging them to sacrifice their souls for him and his family, so that they might meet God with him. He ended his oration by declaring his intention to leave for Iraq on the following morning. Ḥusayn regarded his martyrdom as a victory, as we read in a brief letter he is said to have sent to the members of his family, the sons of Hāshim: 'He among you who joins us will be martyred, and he who remains behind shall not achieve conquest (*fath*).'⁹⁶

In the following chapter, we shall follow the *Imām* from Medina to Mecca, then with his few but brave companions to Karbalā'. Finally, from there, we shall follow the captives accompanying the head of the grandson of the Prophet to Damascus and back to Medina. It must be emphasized once more that our interest in this study is not in the history of Ḥusayn, but rather in the history of *Shī'ī* hagiography concerning him. Our task is, however, to study the Ḥusayn of devotion, the great personality of *Shī'ī* piety whose death became a cosmic event, the central focus of human history.

The Wronged Martyr *al-Shahīd al-Maẓlūm*¹

The martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn cannot be properly understood if considered merely as an isolated event in the early history of the Muslim community. Nor can we dismiss it as a melodrama caused by the stubbornness of an obdurate and politically naive man.² It must rather be placed in the context of Islāmic history from the beginning of the Prophet's career at Medina down to our own time. It has been repeatedly argued in this study that the death of Ḥusayn, at least for the *Shī'ī* community, provides a focal point from which prior, as well as subsequent, history must be viewed. One can still hear from the pulpits of *Shī'ī* mosques that 'Ḥusayn was killed on the day of the *Saqīfah*.'³

We have already seen in the previous chapter that Ḥusayn has been regarded by both *Shī'ī* and *Sunnī* tradition as a man of piety, idealism, nobility of character and ascetic detachment from the world. As an idealist, he could not have agreed with his brother's decision to abandon his claims to the caliphate in favor of Mu'āwīyah. A careful reading of *Shī'ī* and *Sunnī* sources would convince anyone that Ḥusayn's primary motive was not love of power, wealth, or any such material or political ambition.⁴ Rather, he upheld uncompromisingly an Islāmic ideal of social and political life which he saw violated in the rule of Mu'āwīyah, and even more so in the illegitimate usurpation of power by the latter's son Yazīd. He strongly opposed his brother's compromising decision, although he finally accepted it, but with great trepidation. A *Sunnī* writer quotes a statement of Ḥusayn which describes graphically his vehement disapproval. Ḥusayn said, 'Even if my nose had been cut off with a razor, that would have been more agreeable to me than that which my brother has done.'⁵

Ḥusayn's attitude, as we shall see in this chapter, finally cost him his life. We shall first present in this chapter a brief historical background to the events of Karbalā'. Secondly, we shall deal with the early accounts of Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the events leading to it. Finally,

we shall examine some of the later interpretations of this event. As in the rest of this study, our concern here is mainly with the Ḥusayn of piety rather than the Ḥusayn of history. It will be seen that although early historians have treated Ḥusayn's martyrdom with varying degrees of objectivity, this event has never been regarded by Muslims as a mere historical event.

4.1 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the long reign of Mu'āwīyah, and especially after the death of his brother Ḥasan, Ḥusayn received many pledges of support from the *Shī'ī* followers of his father and brother in Iraq calling him to revolt. He always answered that there was a pact between them, that is, he and his brother, and Mu'āwīyah, which he could not break as long as Mu'āwīyah lived.⁶ Yet Ḥusayn intended to advance his claim for the caliphate after Mu'āwīyah's death, counting on the support of his followers (*Shī'ah*) and that of the Muslims in general. He may have been encouraged by the political intrigues and coercion that Mu'āwīyah used to secure the position of his own son, Yazīd, as heir to the caliphal office. According to some historians, an agreement between Mu'āwīyah and Ḥasan stated that, at the death of the former, the caliphate would revert back to Ḥasan, or, in the event of his death, to his brother Ḥusayn.⁷ Mu'āwīyah's designation of his son Yazīd as his successor had a far-reaching effect on the ideal and institution of the caliphate. Thereafter, the caliphate lost its original character. In the eyes of Muslim historians, jurists and the general population, it became a monarchy modeled after the imperial powers of Iran and Byzantium. Thus, although the honorific title 'Commander of the Faithful' (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) continued to be used, the caliph was regarded more as a king than a caliph in the original sense of this word. The change may have been inevitable culturally and politically, but it still had drastic consequences in the religious and political life of the community.

Mu'āwīyah, architect of this change, is portrayed by *Sunnī* as well as *Shī'ī* tradition, in his last days, as an old wise man full of remorse and repentance. He is shown admitting the wrong he had done the family

of Muḥammad and, in a tone of deep regret, charging his son Yazīd to show them all leniency, respect and magnanimity as befits their status with God and the community.⁸

The words attributed to Mu‘āwīyah as his final will to Yazīd deserve some attention, as they show the high regard in which Ḥusayn was held even by his enemies. After speaking to Yazīd of the wrong he had done ‘Alī and his sons for his sake, Mu‘āwīyah said of Ḥusayn:

As for Ḥusayn . . . what can I tell you concerning him? Be careful not to confront him except in a good way. Extend to him a free hand [literally, *a long rope*], and let him roam the earth as he pleases. Do not harm him, yet show him the thunder and lightening [of your anger]. Never confront him with the weapons of war . . . but rather bestow on him generous gifts. Give him a place of honor near you and treat him with due reverence. Be careful O my son, that you do not meet God with his blood, lest you be among those that will perish.⁹

Mu‘āwīyah then declared that Ḥusayn was ‘. . . the remnant of the people of God on the earth in his day’.¹⁰

Mu‘āwīyah died in Rajab 60/680, while Yazīd was, according to some traditions, in Ḥawrān on a hunting trip.¹¹ In that year, al-Walīd Ibn ‘Utbah, a member of the Umayyad house, was the governor of Medina. Yazīd wrote to him asking that he take the allegiance (*bay‘ah*) of the people of Medina, by force if necessary; he should be especially strict with Ḥusayn. Some writers add that Yazīd included in his letter a tiny piece of parchment as big as a mouse’s ear on which he added, ‘Take the allegiance (*bay‘ah*) of ‘Abdallāh son of ‘Umar, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, son of Abū Bakr, ‘Abdallāh Ibn al-Zubayr and Ḥusayn Ibn ‘Alī with extreme force, allowing for no excuses, and if anyone of them refuses, have him beheaded and send me his head.’¹² It is noteworthy that the opposition Yazīd feared was from the sons of the Prophet’s closest companions, two of whom were the sons of the first and second caliphs.

When the letter of Yazīd reached al-Walīd, he called for Marwān Ibn al-Ḥakam to consult with him concerning Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Zubayr, as he knew that these two would not easily submit to Yazīd’s offers. Marwān advised al-Walīd to send immediately for them and ask them

to give their *bay'ah* at once; if they refused, he should have them beheaded before the news of Mu'āwīyah's death spread in the city. Later in the afternoon, Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Zubayr were called to the governor's house. Ḥusayn divined the reason for such an unusual summons at that late hour; he gathered a number of armed men whom he stationed at the door of the governor's house when he went in. He instructed the men to storm the house if his voice got too loud or if he called for help.

Al-Walīd read Yazīd's letter to Ḥusayn reporting the death of Mu'āwīyah and asking the people of Medina to acknowledge him as his father's successor. Ḥusayn answered that the governor would surely prefer to have him give his *bay'ah* not in secret but rather openly with the rest of the people the following morning.¹³ According to another tradition, Ḥusayn refused to acknowledge Yazīd's claim to such a sacred office, and contrasted that false claim and Yazīd's character with the family of the Prophet and his own rightful claim to be the successor of his grandfather. He said:

We are the household of prophethood, frequented by angels, the essence of apostleship and the locus of the descent of divine mercy. With us God opened [with Abraham the Prophet?], and with us He has closed [with Muḥammad?]. Yazīd, however, is a reprobate, a drinker of wine and one killing [the innocent] soul [unlawfully] and practicing openly all manners of corruption. A man like me therefore cannot give *bay'ah* to one like Yazīd. Still we shall see on the morrow and you too shall see who of us is more worthy of the caliphate and the *bay'ah*.¹⁴

Al-Walīd agreed that Ḥusayn should come with the rest of the people, but Marwān advised that Ḥusayn be either imprisoned until he would assent or be executed. Ḥusayn, however, confronted Marwān with angry threats and left the governor's house.¹⁵ Al-Walīd's reproachful answer to Marwān expresses once more the general respect Ḥusayn enjoyed in the early community of Muslims:

Woe to another than yourself, O Marwān [euphemistically used to mean *woe to you*], you have chosen for me that in which will be the destruction of my faith (*dīn*). By God even if I were to possess all the

wealth of this world on which the sun rises and sets, and in return I would have to kill Ḥusayn, I would choose otherwise. Should I kill Ḥusayn simply because he said 'I shall not give allegiance'; by God I do not believe that there would be any man whose balance would be lighter on the Day of Judgment than one judged for the blood of Ḥusayn.¹⁶

That same night Ibn al-Zubayr fled secretly to Mecca, taking by-roads in order to avoid the pursuing forces of the Umayyad government. Ḥusayn could not have remained in Medina for long before he also would be harassed by the authorities. While the Umayyad troops went in search of Ibn al-Zubayr, they left Ḥusayn alone for that day. He met Marwān on the street, however, who advised him to submit to Yazīd's rule, as other men did, and not to create discord among the people. Here again Ḥusayn's answer typifies clearly his view of Islām protected by a leader such as Yazīd: '“ . . . Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return,”¹⁷ for Islām would be ruined if the community (*ummah*) is to be afflicted with a shepherd such as Yazīd.'¹⁸

4.2 EARLY ACCOUNTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF ḤUSAYN'S MARTYRDOM

Ḥusayn, as we have observed, could not have remained in Medina without giving up his opposition to Yazīd. This he could not do, however, and still uphold idealism and strict adherence to the requirements of Islām as he saw them. His long standing opposition to Mu'āwīyah as well, which after the death of Ḥasan placed him in the position of leadership in the struggle against Umayyad rule, kept him from accepting Yazīd.

Shī'ī piety has viewed the martyrdom of Ḥusayn as a divinely preordained event, a view strongly expressed in the *Shī'ī* theology of the *imāms*. Although much has been read back by later hagiographers and even historians in support of this view, still it would not have been difficult for his friends and relatives to predict his tragic end, as, we are told, many of them did. Even if the martyrdom of Ḥusayn is not

considered as a preordained event from the viewpoint of *Shī'ī* theology of the *imāms*, still Ḥusayn's friends and relatives would have anticipated his tragic end.

His difficult plight and struggle against bitter fate were predicted with amazing accuracy by his half-brother Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, in his last words of farewell to Ḥusayn before the latter left for Mecca. Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah first advised his brother to seek refuge in Mecca or Yemen, or to roam the earth, until he was sure of popular support and possible victory. He counselled, 'Avoid, with your family, Yazīd son of Mu'āwiyah as far as you can. Send out in the meanwhile your emissaries to the people calling them to yourself. If the people then pledge allegiance to you give thanks to God for that; but if they agree on someone else, God would not because of this diminish your faith (*dīn*) or wisdom; nor would he cause you to lose your manliness or virtue.'¹⁹ In the last sentence it is clear that Ḥusayn's social and spiritual status in the community depended in great measure on his decision at that crucial point in Islāmic history. Predicting the outcome of his brother's course of action in the case of a direct confrontation, Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah continued:

I fear for you that you may enter one of the provinces where men would disagree regarding you, one group being with you and another against you. Then they would fight among themselves, and you would be the first target of their weapons. Thus the best man of this community, in its noblest of lineage, would be the one whose blood is most senselessly shed, and his family utterly humiliated.²⁰

It was suggested above that Ḥusayn was driven by uncompromising idealism on a course which, he as well as others knew, was to lead to his death. This idealism in turn led, we believe, to a deep rift in Islām that was never to be healed. Most of our sources report the tradition that Ḥusayn was supposed to have written his final will with his own hand, sealed it, and entrusted it to his brother Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah at their last meeting. Again this will contains yet another statement of Ḥusayn's motives in championing the revolt against the Umayyad ruler. He wrote:

. . . I have not risen up in revolt out of evil intent or greed, neither to perpetuate corruption nor wrongdoing. Rather I did so in quest of

establishing right order (*iṣlāḥ*) in the community (*ummah*) of my grandfather. . . . I wish to enjoin right conduct (*ma'rūf*) and dissuade from that which is unsalutary (*munkar*) and follow the example of my grandfather and my father 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.²¹ If men would accept me in truth, it is to God that they would render acceptance, for He is worthy of all truth. But if they reject me I would bear it with patience and submit to God's judgment between me and the people, for He is the best of judges.²²

Ḥusayn left Medina for Mecca by night, probably two days before the end of Rajab (60/680).²³ Unlike Ibn al-Zubayr, however, Ḥusayn followed the main road, refusing to hide his intentions of opposition and revolt. His mission seemed to him like that of the Prophet Moses against the Egyptian Pharaoh, oppressor of the Prophet's people. Ḥusayn left Medina repeating the Qur'ānic verse attributed to Moses, 'So he departed therefrom fearful and vigilant . . .' and like him, he prayed, '. . . My Lord, deliver me from the people of the evildoers.' Again like Moses when he drew nigh to the land of the Midianites, Ḥusayn prayed as he approached Mecca, 'It may be that my Lord will guide me on the right way.'²⁴

Ḥusayn stayed in Mecca for about four months, leaving it before completing his pilgrimage rites (*ḥajj*).²⁵ Soon after he arrived in Mecca he sent his cousin Muslim, son of 'Aqīl, to Kūfah to prepare the ground for him. Ḥusayn had, in the meantime, received many letters and emissaries from Kūfah calling him to lead the opposition against Yazīd, and pledging their absolute support. Muslim left Mecca in Ramaḍān, and finally arrived in Kūfah after suffering many hardships on that fateful journey. First he lost heart when he and his two guides lost their way, and the two men perished of thirst. Midway, he wrote to Ḥusayn, asking to be relieved of this task whose success he had doubted from the start. But Ḥusayn insisted that he continue on his mission, charging him with cowardice.²⁶

At the time Muslim arrived in Kūfah, its governor was al-Nu'mān b. Bashīr. The governor knew of the activities of Muslim, who was quickly rounding up the supporters of Ḥusayn in readiness for his arrival. But as he was a mild man, not wishing to do harm to members of the family of the Prophet, or at least initiate hostilities, he did

nothing to stop Muslim. 'Umar Ibn Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ²⁷ and other supporters wrote to Yazīd of Muslim's popularity in the city, advising stern measures as al-Nu'mān was too weak to deal with the situation.

Yazīd's court secretary Sarjūn, a Syrian Christian, produced a document in which Mu'āwīyah had stipulated that 'Ubaydallāh Ibn Ziyād be given the governorship of Kūfah in addition to that of Baṣrah, which he was already governing. Ziyād, 'Ubaydallāh's father, was a slave who had been adopted into the Umayyad house by Mu'āwīyah as his own brother.²⁸ According to *Shī'ī* tradition, Ibn Ziyād was an illegitimate child by virtue of his father's lineage. As the story goes, Abū Sufyān, Mu'āwīyah's father, was drunk one night, and in his drunkenness he seduced Sumayyah, Ziyād's mother, making Ziyād and his descendants children of adultery. Later, however, Mu'āwīyah was impressed with the intelligence of Ziyād, and wishing to elevate him and save his own father's reputation, decided to adopt his illegitimate brother into his family. He did so against the clear injunction of the Prophet's saying (*ḥadīth*) 'A child belongs to the bed [marriage bed] of the parents, and to the harlot (*'āhir*) the stone [i.e., stoning].'²⁹

Ibn Ziyād was a resourceful and often cruel politician who spared nothing in order to attain his political ends. His strong and ruthless character, coupled with his impure lineage, rendered Ibn Ziyād the arch-symbol of evil and even infidelity (*kufr*) in *Shī'ī* popular piety.

We are told that Muslim was enthusiastically received by the Kūfāns and at once began gathering supporters and arms. Encouraged by this initial success, he wrote to Ḥusayn urging him to make haste, since the people were waiting for him and would do nothing except by his command.³⁰ Prior to sending Muslim, Ḥusayn had received more than fifty letters from Iraq, urging him to come and take command of an army waiting for him.³¹ The last letter from the Kūfāns described the general festive rejoicing of nature at the prospect of Ḥusayn's arrival, seen symbolically as the prevailing of good over evil: '... behold the earth had become verdant with green grass, fruits have ripened, and trees are adorned with leaves. . . .'³²

With the last two of the Kūfan messengers, Ḥusayn himself sent a letter stating his aim in declaring opposition to Yazīd's rule, and elucidating his ideal of what a good leader (*imām*) of the Muslim

community should be. He wrote, ' . . . for by my life, the *imām* is only he who judges according to the Book (Qur'ān) and *sunnah* [of the Prophet] dealing justly with the people, binding himself to the religion of truth (*dīn al-ḥaqq*), and restraining himself from all else but God.'³³

In their letters, the people of Kūfah insisted that they had no *imām*, and thus they urged Ḥusayn to come to them that God may bring them together with him to the path of truth and divine guidance. Ḥusayn, therefore, could not but answer what he regarded to be a call to the service of God and the community (*ummah*) of Islām. Whatever other motives he may have had, this one cannot be ignored. Indeed, a well-known *Sunnī* writer reports on the authority of Ibn Hishām that the Kūfans charged Ḥusayn with transgression (*ithm*) if he would not answer their summons.³⁴ Ṭabarī, moreover, writing on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf, insisted on the same point, however indirectly, throughout his narrative of the events leading to Ḥusayn's uprising and death.³⁵

Ḥusayn's message to those he invited to support him in his struggle enjoined them to the good and dissuaded them from evil. Before leaving Mecca he wrote to the people of Baṣrah declaring that Muḥammad was chosen by God to be His Apostle and that, as his descendants, they were his vicegerents and the executors of his mission after him. Then Ḥusayn continued, ' . . . for behold the *sunnah* has been rendered dead, and innovations are made alive. Thus if you listen to my words and obey my commands I shall guide you to the right path. . . .'³⁶ But those who pledged support did so not to Ḥusayn or his cause but to the chiefs and notables of their own tribes. Thus in the end they did nothing to show their loyalty, a loyalty which was to men and not to a cause. Ibn Ziyād learned of the letter shortly before leaving for Kūfah. He had the messenger of Ḥusayn beheaded and crucified, and threatened a similar punishment to anyone who showed signs of revolt or disobedience.³⁷

Muslim at first stayed at the house of al-Mukhtār b. 'Ubaydallāh al-Thaqafī, a man who was to wreak havoc in the Umayyad state, and especially in Iraq, in revenge of the blood of Ḥusayn. Ibn Ziyād, however, began to spread informers to find out the whereabouts of Muslim, forcing the latter to shift his base of operations to the house of Hānī b. 'Urwah al-Murādī, one of the notables of Kūfah. When Ibn

Ziyād finally learned of Muslim's hiding place he sent for Hānī, whom he beat severely and finally executed. Before Hānī's death, Sharīk al-A'war, a friend of Ibn Ziyād, who was secretly of the *Shī'ah* of 'Alī, had fallen ill. Ibn Ziyād had come to visit his friend, and Sharīk and Muslim had conspired to kill the governor during that visit. As Ziyād sat by Sharīk's bedside, Muslim was to come out and kill him. But Muslim at the last moment abandoned the plan, and Ibn Ziyād went home safe but deeply suspicious. Muslim did not kill his enemy, first because Hānī did not wish him to be killed within his house, and secondly because he recalled a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet which says, 'Faith (*imān*) is a restraint against treachery, so let no believer commit a treacherous act'.³⁸

When Muslim heard of the death of Hānī, he went out with his supporters to invade the palace and kill Ibn Ziyād. The latter, however, using threats and bribes, told the notables of Kūfah, then with him, to talk to the mob outside and persuade them to desert Muslim. At last Muslim was left alone; after a bitter struggle, he was captured and brought before Ibn Ziyād. After a long exchange of harsh words between the two men, Muslim was taken up to the roof of the palace and beheaded, his head and corpse thrown down into the marketplace below in order to intimidate the populace.

This story of Muslim has received much attention from *Shī'ī* writers and popular piety. We have indicated his moral uprightness in choosing not to attack a man unawares, as enjoined by the Prophet. This virtue, together with his phenomenal bravery and magnanimity, are strongly stressed and highly dramatized by the *Shī'ī* community. Muslim was the first of the martyrs of Karbalā', and, like other martyrs among the immediate relatives of Ḥusayn, his heroic role and personality grew with the passing years in the rich soil of pietistic imagination.

It has been argued above that Ḥusayn was an idealist who could not compromise his principles; thus it may be said that he lacked the flexibility and diplomatic tact of a politician. It was argued further that, as an idealist, he could not break a promise he made, even if it would cost him his life. We shall return presently to this point, but it must be added here that the aura of mystery, a sense of preordained fate latent in many of the statements attributed to Ḥusayn, cannot be

explained on purely political grounds. Nor can this aspect be ignored if the story of Ḥusayn is to be at all appreciated, let alone understood. We see, in fact, three motives operating in the drama of Ḥusayn's martyrdom: his idealism, the belief that his fate was predetermined, and the certainty he seems to have had that he either had to submit or be killed. These three motives, however, cannot be separated.)

Both in Medina and Mecca, Ḥusayn insisted that his actions were taken in response to a direct divine command. When his brother, Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, protested against Ḥusayn's hasty departure, the latter answered that '... the Apostle of God came to me in a dream and said, "O Ḥusayn, depart [in revolt] for God has willed to see you killed."' To the further protest that he should not expose his women and children to such a danger, Ḥusayn replied: '... God has willed to see them captives.'³⁹

Likewise in Mecca many came to him advising submission, or at least passive resistance, by simply refusing to give his approval of the new regime. But Ḥusayn knew that he had only two alternatives. The first was to give allegiance to Yazīd, and thus disobey a divine command and also live as a coward and a traitor in the eyes of his followers (*Shī'ah*). The other alternative, soon apparent in the course of events, was to resist and be killed if necessary. To those who opposed his plan in Mecca, he said that he would rather be killed outside the holy city, in order that its sanctity not be violated by the shedding of blood. In a statement which Ṭabarī reports on the authority of Ḥusayn's companions (who are not identified), Ḥusayn expresses the same idea even more graphically, and predicts the fate of his opponents after his death.

By God they shall not leave me alone until they extract that leech from my throat.⁴⁰ Yet if they do that, God would empower over them one who would so humiliate them until they become the most humiliated of all communities.⁴¹

Just outside Mecca, Ḥusayn met the famous poet, al-Farazdaq, who, with great surprise, inquired why Ḥusayn had left Mecca before completing his *ḥajj*. Ḥusayn again answered, 'Had I not left in haste, I would have been arrested.'⁴² To another man who put the same question to him, Ḥusayn gave a rather revealing answer. 'The sons of Umayyah usurped my possessions, and I bore that patiently; they

reviled my honor and I bore that patiently too. Then they sought my life, and so I fled.⁴³ Ḥusayn's fear of being arrested, or even killed, by men sent by Yazīd especially for that purpose, is expressed in an interesting letter which Ibn 'Abbās, Ḥusayn's cousin, sent to 'Yazīd after Ḥusayn's death. Ibn 'Abbās reprimanded Yazīd for being so audacious as to seek his support after killing so many men of his family. Speaking of Ḥusayn, he continued, '. . . how can I forget the way you chased Ḥusayn out from the sacred house (*ḥaram*), of God and His Apostle, and your writing to Ibn Murjānah [Ibn Ziyād], ordering him to kill Ḥusayn.' Later in the letter Ibn 'Abbās returns to the same theme, '. . . Have you forgotten that you sent your supporters to the sacred house of God to drive Ḥusayn out, and how you continued to frighten him until you forced him to depart for Iraq. . . .'⁴⁴

In a tradition reported on the authority of 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, the only surviving son of Ḥusayn, we are told that 'Abdallāh Ibn Ja'far, Ḥusayn's cousin, learning of his departure from Mecca, prevailed on the governor, 'Amr Ibn Sa'īd, to write a letter of reconciliation and security for Ḥusayn. This the governor did, and Ibn Ja'far and the governor's brother Yaḥyā carried the letter to him, just outside the city. 'Abdallāh moreover preceded that letter with one of his own, urging Ḥusayn to reconsider his plans and, in any case, to wait for him, as he was on his way. The letter was carried by 'Abdallāh's two sons, who stayed with Ḥusayn and were killed with him. Again Ḥusayn refused to return with the two men, declaring 'I saw the Apostle of God in a dream and he sent me on a mission which I shall fulfill, be it for me or against me.' When asked what that dream was, he replied, 'I have told no one, nor will I tell anyone of it until I meet my Lord.'⁴⁵ Both in Mecca and at every stage of his journey to Karbalā', Ḥusayn was warned by friends and relatives of the futility of his mission, and advised to abandon it.

Our sources are not all in agreement as to when Muslim was executed by Ibn Ziyād, or whether Ḥusayn learned of his death while still in Mecca or on his way to Kūfah.⁴⁶ It is more probable that somewhere along the way Ḥusayn was told of the death of Muslim. He considered seriously abandoning his plan and returning to Mecca or Medina, or at least not going to Kūfah until the situation had

become clearer. But the sons and brothers of Muslim objected, saying that they would not return without either avenging the blood of Muslim or being killed like him. Ḥusayn had no choice but to go on with his plan of revolt and revenge.

It must be observed that Muslim's last wish was that someone be sent to Ḥusayn to report to him what had happened and urge him not to go to Kūfah. We are told that when Muslim was captured and his sword taken away from, he wept, saying, 'It is not for myself that I weep, nor am I afraid of death . . . but I weep for my relatives who are coming. I weep for Ḥusayn and his family. . . .'⁴⁷ Moments before his execution, Muslim looked around in the crowd assembled in Ibn Ziyād's court for someone to whom he could entrust his last will. Ibn Sa'd was a Qurayshī, a cousin and the son of a close companion of the Prophet. So Muslim requested Ibn Sa'd to come aside with him; the latter at first hesitated, until Ibn Ziyād observed that he should hear the will of his cousin. Again Muslim asked that someone be sent to intercept Ḥusayn on the road and prevent his coming. He asked Ibn Sa'd further to see to his burial and to sell his sword and armor to pay some debts he was leaving behind. Ibn Sa'd, however, immediately told Ibn Ziyād what Muslim had confided to him, but Ibn Ziyād reproached him for not keeping the confidence of his cousin.

Ḥusayn counted on the support of the Kūfans who had invited him to come to them, as he himself had only a small group of relatives and followers capable of fighting. According to most sources, his fighting men consisted of thirty-two horsemen and forty foot soldiers. Other authorities fix the number at forty-five horsemen and one hundred foot soldiers, or at most several hundred fighters altogether.⁴⁸ In any case, most of those who attached themselves to Ḥusayn, thinking him to be a victorious conqueror and hoping for much booty, left him on the way when they knew of Muslim's death and the uncertainty of Ḥusayn's own fate. Thus it seems that the number of men with Ḥusayn could have varied little from those who set out with him, except for a few who joined later. We shall return later to consider more closely the fighting and a few of those who took part in it.

To the end, even after Ḥusayn learned of the death of Muslim, he hoped that the Kūfans would change their attitude and honor their pledges of support. He sent his foster brother, 'Abdallāh Ibn Yaḡtur,

with yet another message reminding the people of their allegiance, and reproaching them for their treachery.⁴⁹ Ibn Ziyād took ‘Abdallāh and ordered him to curse Ḥusayn and his father publicly, and praise Yazīd and his father. Instead, however, ‘Abdallāh did exactly the opposite, telling the people of Ḥusayn’s imminent arrival. So Ibn Ziyād had him taken to the top of the palace, and with his hands and feet bound he was thrown down and died instantly. When Ḥusayn was later told of ‘Abdallāh’s death, he repeated with tearful eyes:

Some of them have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting, and they have not changed in the least.⁵⁰ O God make the Garden [of paradise] an abode for them and us, and bring us with them together into an abode of Thy mercies on the bountiful treasures of Thy well desired rewards.⁵¹

At the news of the death of Muslim, Ḥusayn was reassured by his companions that he was not like Muslim; if he were to reach Kūfah, its people would not abandon him. But such hopes were being shattered with every step. Not only was every hope of success lost but even any hope of negotiation short of surrender or death had to be abandoned. Ḥusayn met a man from Kūfah who pleaded with him, saying:

I beg you in the name of God, O son of the Apostle of God, that the sanctity of Islām not be violated. I adjure you in God’s name that you beware of the sanctity of the Apostle of God on the honor of the Arabs, that they not be violated. For by God if you seek that which is in the hands of the Umayyads [the power] they would kill you: and if they were to kill you, they would fear no one after you.⁵²

These words turned out to be words of prophecy, as we shall see, for not only in Ḥusayn’s time, but for some time after him, chaos and death dominated the Umayyad scene. The man’s words indicate yet another thing: that by the death of Ḥusayn the community would be disgraced and the religion of Islām violated.

Ibn Ziyād sent al-Ḥurr Ibn Yazīd al-Riyāḥī with a thousand horsemen to intercept Ḥusayn and bring him captive to Kūfah. Al-Ḥurr, however, was specifically charged to keep an eye on Ḥusayn’s movements and keep Ibn Ziyād informed of his activities. He met Ḥusayn near al-Qādisīyyah, not far from Karbalā’. The men and horses of

al-Ḥurr were exhausted from the heat of the desert sun and Ḥusayn ordered his men to give both men and animals water to drink. Al-Ḥurr again told Ḥusayn of the situation in Kūfah, and warned him of the dangers that lay ahead. When the time came for afternoon prayers, Ḥusayn led the prayers of both camps. After the prayers, he delivered a short sermon in which he reminded the men of their letters to him. He also reminded them of his status as the grandson of the Prophet, that he was more worthy of their allegiance and the leadership of the community than the Umayyad rulers. But if they were now displeased with his coming, he indicated that he would return to the place from which he had come.⁵³

He spoke more specifically of why he was taking such a risk, jeopardizing his life and that of his family and friends:

O people, the Apostle of God said during his life, 'He who sees an oppressive ruler violating the sanctions (*ḥalāl*) of God, revoking the covenant of God, opposing the *sunnah* of the Apostle of God, dealing with the servant of God sinfully and cruelly; [if a man sees such a ruler] and does not show zeal against him in word or deed, God would surely cause him to enter his abode in the fire.'⁵⁴

Then the *Imām* described the Umayyad rulers in the light of his prophetic *ḥadīth*:

These men have verily abided by the obedience of Satan and abandoned the obedience of the Merciful. They have displayed all corruption: annulling the limits of God, usurping the people's wealth, allowing what God had prohibited and prohibiting what He had sanctioned.⁵⁵

Ḥusayn declared that he was most worthy to be zealous in the cause of the divine law and *sunnah* of the Prophet. If those listening would join him in this holy struggle (*jihād*), it would be for their good; if not, they would have rejected their share of the reward for such an act of faith in the world to come.

The men protested that they were not among those who wrote to him; they knew nothing of such letters. He brought out two sacks full of their letters, and many were ashamed to see their names among those who had written. They insisted that he submit to the rule of his

cousins, who surely would do him no harm. Ḥusayn answered with the words of some verses first used by a man similarly counselled against fighting with the Prophet in the Battle of Badr.

I shall go, for there is no shame in the death of a youth if he intends truthfulness and engages in the struggle as a Muslim. . . . For then if I live I shall have no remorse and if I die I shall incur no blame. It is sufficient humiliation for you to live and be coerced.⁵⁶

At the time of Ḥusayn's death one could hardly speak of a *Shī'ī* community in the strict sense. There were, at best, partisans for one or the other of the leading personalities: the party of 'Alī, of course, as well as that of 'Uthmān and the Umayyad rulers after him. This lack of crystallization into the different religious sects of later times is illustrated within a small group of Ḥusayn's followers martyred with him in Karbalā'. One of these was Zuhayr Ibn al-Qayn al-Bajlī, a pious man who was formerly an 'Uthmānī partisan against 'Alī. Ḥusayn met him on the way, as both men and their families and friends encamped in one spot. When Ḥusayn sent for him, Zuhayr hesitated until his wife suggested that he go and hear what the son of 'the daughter of the Apostle of God had to say to him. Soon Zuhayr returned with a radiant countenance and ordered that his tent and goods be transferred to Ḥusayn's camp. He divorced his wife and sent her home so that she would not have to endure any hardships with him, which he foresaw ensuing from this allegiance. To his friends and relatives he said, 'He who wishes to join me can do so, otherwise this will be our final parting.'⁵⁷ One of the bitterest enemies of Ḥusayn, Shimr Ibn Dhī-l-Jawshan, was one of the party of 'Alī before, and even fought on his side in the battle of Ṣiffin.

At first Ḥusayn agreed with al-Ḥurr to take a road that would lead him neither to Kūfah nor back to al-Ḥijāz, and in the meantime, al-Ḥurr would write to Ibn Ziyād for further instructions. Al-Tirmāḥ Ibn 'Adī of the tribe of Ṭayy, then approached Ḥusayn, inviting him to their camps where he would gather five thousand fighting men for him. But Ḥusayn rejected his offer on the grounds that there was between him and the Kūfans an agreement that he did not wish to break. In another version of this tradition, al-Tirmāḥ made the suggestion once more when the two armies were on the point of fighting. He

then suggested that he and Ḥusayn should set out quietly at night, but Ḥusayn again answered, 'Is it right for a man to save himself and let his family perish?'⁵⁸

Ḥusayn arrived in Karbalā' on Thursday the second of Muḥarram in the year of 61 A.H. It is reported that he asked his followers what the name of that place was, and they answered that it was Karbalā'. He said:

O God, in Thee do I take refuge from sorrow (*karb*) and calamity (*balā'*). This is the place of sorrow and calamity; dismount. Here will be the spot of the end of our journey, the spot whereon our blood shall be shed, and the spot of our graves. Of this my grandfather the Apostle of God informed me.⁵⁹

The next day a courier came running to al-Ḥurr, and delivered a letter to him from Ibn Ziyād. He was ordered to keep Ḥusayn away from the water of the Euphrates, to deprive him of shelter and a place of refuge. The messenger, moreover, was sent to keep watch and make sure that the governor's orders were carried out. Zuhayr suggested that they should fight al-Ḥurr and his men before many others arrived, against whom they would never be able to prevail. Ḥusayn objected, saying, 'I would not start the fighting.'⁶⁰

Ibn Ziyād had appointed 'Umar Ibn Sa'd as a representative (*wālī*) of the administration in the province of Rayy and Jurjān; in return, 'Umar was to lead an army against the Daylamites of Central Asia. But seeing that 'Umar was a Qurayshī, the son of one of the Prophet's companions, Ibn Ziyād ordered him first to go to Karbalā' and deal with Ḥusayn before proceeding with the Daylamites. Sending Ibn Sa'd against Ḥusayn was no doubt a political tactic aimed at placing the blame for Ḥusayn's death squarely on the shoulders of one of the tribe of Quraysh, or at least sharing the blame with one who had considerable standing in the community. As we shall see presently, Ibn Ziyād used this advantage to the fullest possible degree.

When Ibn Sa'd asked to be relieved of this mission, Ibn Ziyād insisted that he either obey his orders or be relieved of his other administrative post as well. After a few days of hesitation and in spite of the advice of everyone he consulted, 'Umar accepted the assignment against Ḥusayn and proceeded to Karbalā' with four thousand men.

‘Umar went to Karbalā’ with the hope that an actual confrontation with Ḥusayn could be avoided, and that he would be able to convince the latter to give up the struggle in the face of such great danger to his life and the lives of his followers. Thus Ibn Sa’d sent a man to Ḥusayn, asking the reason for his coming. Ḥusayn gave an answer essentially the same as in the sermons he had given on the way to Karbalā’. He said that the people of Kūfah wrote to him promising allegiance and support. If they now had changed their minds and wished to revoke their promises, he would go back to the place from which he came. ‘Umar wrote of this to Ibn Ziyād and received the answer that he should force Ḥusayn to submit to Yazīd’s rule by keeping him virtually a prisoner in that desert place and not allowing him and his followers to approach the waters until they gave allegiance to Yazīd or died of thirst, just as it was done to the pious ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān.⁶¹

Ibn Sa’d then sent five hundred men as guards over the banks of the Euphrates, on the seventh of Muḥarram. Still Ibn Sa’d hoped to avoid a confrontation with Ḥusayn, and the two men met often at night between the two camps and talked at length. According to Ṭabarī,⁶² no one actually heard what they discussed, but people surmised that Ḥusayn offered Ibn Sa’d one of three choices:

. . . that I return to the place from which I came, that I put my hand in the hand of Yazīd Ibn Mu‘āwīyah and he would see into the matter between us; or let me go to any land you choose to be one of its people enjoying their privileges and fulfilling their duties.⁶³

Most early sources do not question this tradition, generally reported with only minor variants. Ḥusayn, it seems, was willing to accept a compromise based on one of the three choices already discussed. Ṭabarī presents another tradition, however, which gained greater acceptance with the passing of time, especially among *Shī‘ī* writers. Many writers consciously have argued, with all the apologetics possible, against any hint that Ḥusayn would submit to Yazīd’s authority or judgment.⁶⁴ On the authority of Abū Mikhnaf, Ṭabarī reports that ‘Uqbah Ibn Sam‘ān said he accompanied Ḥusayn on his entire journey from Medina and heard every word he said. Ibn Sam‘ān insisted that Ḥusayn said nothing of what men repeated among themselves. He

rather said, 'Let me go, so that I may roam God's broad earth until we see what will be decided among men concerning this matter.'⁶⁵

Ibn Sa'd wrote to the governor advising peace and reconciliation, as Ḥusayn himself intended no war but rather offered to accept any one of three means to peace. At first Ibn Ziyād agreed, praising Ibn Sa'd for his efforts. Then Shimr Ibn Dhī-l Jawshan dissuaded him, pointing out that if he let Ḥusayn go while he was in his domain, he would be admitting to weakness and would never again get such an opportunity. The governor should, Shimr suggested, force Ḥusayn to submit to his own judgment; and it would be up to him to decide what course Ḥusayn should take. Ibn Ziyād, therefore, sent him with a letter to Ibn Sa'd ordering him to demand the unconditional submission of Ḥusayn or, failing that, to kill him and his followers. He added that if Ḥusayn was to be killed, horses should trample his back and chest with their hooves as a final punishment. Shimr was further instructed that if Ibn Sa'd refused to carry out the governor's orders, the leadership of the army should go to Shimr, who was then to execute Ibn Sa'd and send his head to Ibn Ziyād.⁶⁶

Shimr carried Ibn Ziyād's message to 'Umar on the ninth of Muḥarram. Prior to that, Ibn Sa'd had carried out half-heartedly the governor's orders to keep Ḥusayn away from the water. With fifty men, Ḥusayn's half brother, al-'Abbās, was able to fill twenty water skins for the thirsty men, women and children of his brother's camp. With the coming of Shimr, however, 'Umar had no other choice but to force the issue to a conclusion. In the late afternoon he gathered his forces and marched towards Ḥusayn's tents. Ḥusayn was sitting by his tent, leaning on his sword and dozing. His sister heard the clamour of men and horses and ran to alert him. He woke up, startled and related a dream he had just had of the Prophet, who had told him, 'O Ḥusayn my beloved, you shall be coming to us soon.'⁶⁷ Ḥusayn sent his brother to ask Ibn Sa'd to postpone the confrontation until morning so that they could pray to God for guidance.

We are told on the authority of Ḥusayn's son, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, that Ḥusayn and his followers spent the night before their death in prayers and recitation of the Qur'ān, so that their voices could be heard like the buzzing of bees.⁶⁸ Zayn al-'Ābidīn was then a youth and very sick: unable to fight or leave the tent, in the end his sickness saved his

life. During the night he drew nearer to hear what his father was saying to his companions. This short sermon, reported on his authority by practically all sources with very minor variations, is a truly moving oration:

I praise God with the best of praise, and thank Him for happiness and misfortunes. . . . Furthermore, I know of no companions or people of a household (*ahl bayt*) more faithful and true than my companions and people of my household. May God therefore grant you all the best of rewards on my behalf. In truth, I think that we shall have a harsh day with these people. I therefore grant you all leave; go away, all of you with my permission and without any obligation to me. Behold the night has covered you so use it as a camel. Let each of you take the hand of one member of my family and spread abroad in the land until God sends His relief. For the people want me, and if they find me they would be satisfied and seek no one else.⁶⁹

Turning to the sons of Muslim, he said, 'Sufficient for you is the death of your father. Make haste and save yourselves.' But they answered,

What would people say! We left our elder and master and our cousins, the best of cousins, and did not throw an arrow, stab with a spear, or wield the sword on their behalf; nor would we know what had become of them. No, by God we shall not leave you, but shall sacrifice our lives and wealth for you. We shall fight for you until we share your lot.⁷⁰

Likewise, his friends expressed similar sentiments of loyalty and self-sacrifice. The words of one of them, Muslim Ibn 'Awsajah, may be taken as typical. After declaring that he would fight for Ḥusayn until death, so that God would be a witness that he had kept the sanctity and reverence of the Apostle of God inviolate through Ḥusayn, Muslim concluded:

. . . By God not even if I know that I would be killed and brought back to life then burnt, and again brought back to life, then scattered as ashes in the wind, and this is repeated seventy times, I would not leave you until I meet my death before you. How would I not do so

when it is only one death after which comes the great favor (*karāmah*) of which there shall be no end.⁷¹

Later that night, Ḥusayn sat preparing his sword. As he did so, he repeated several times the verses:

O time (*dahr*) fie on you of a friend.
How many are those you claim in the morn and eventide.
Many a friend and many a one seeking revenge, yet
time is not satisfied with a meagre share.
Truly judgment belongs to the Lord of Majesty;
And to every living soul is appointed its separate path.⁷²

His son, 'Alī, heard the verses and choked with his tears. But his aunt, Zaynab, who was nursing him in his illness, heard her brother's words and ran out beating her breast and cheeks and raising the lament, 'Woe to me, I wish death had deprived me of life. Today my father, my mother and my brother died, O you [Ḥusayn] the remnant of those that went before, and the consolation of those that still are.'⁷³ Ḥusayn consoled her and charged her not to lament him, rend her clothes or scratch her face should he be killed. He ended with the old proverb, 'Had al-Qaṭā been left alone, at night, it would have slept.'⁷⁴

As we have seen, the followers of Ḥusayn joined his camp with the knowledge that they were going to die. Their resolve to fight and die with him had a political as well as religious basis. Among them were men well known for their piety and integrity, and for whom partisan considerations mattered not at all. In the morning, in preparation for death, Ḥusayn and his friends went into a tent to rub themselves with musk and other aromatic ointments. One of them, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Anṣārī, was waiting for his turn outside next to another companion, Barīr Ibn Khuḍayr, who began to jest with his friend. 'Abd al-Raḥmān protested, 'This is not an hour of jest and vanity.' Barīr answered:

By God, my people knew me as one despising vanity both as a youth and a grown man. But by God, I rejoice for that which we are soon to receive. For there is between us and the black-eyed houris only that these men should turn upon us with their swords, and how I wish they would have done it.⁷⁵

Our sources dwell at great length on the bravery of Ḥusayn's companions and their willingness to die in his defence. A few examples of this loyalty to the son of the daughter of Muḥammad, a loyalty which to his companions was an act of faith, a fulfillment of a religious imperative, the *jihād*, or struggle in the way of God, will be discussed presently.

The night before the battle Ḥusayn had a trench dug on one side of his camp and filled it with faggots and reeds kindled into a fire in order to keep that side protected against the advance of the opposing army. He also had the tents pitched close to one another, leaving only one side open for the fighting. The day began with verbal exchanges and skirmishes, then the people on both sides fought in single combat. Ḥusayn mounted his horse and sat witnessing his friends falling one by one before his eyes. With the Qur'ān spread before him, he lifted up his hands in supplication to God and uttered the following prayer:

O God Thou art my trust in every sorrow, and my hope in every hardship. In every difficulty I have encountered, Thou wert for me a refuge and a strength. How many a heavy burden (*hamm*) which weakens the heart and baffles the mind, renders a friend impotent and causes the enemy to rejoice, I brought before Thee with my complaint and Thou didst relieve me thereof. Thou art the end of my desire above all else. Thou art truly the bestower of every bounty, the source of every blessing and goal of every desire.⁷⁶

It has been repeatedly emphasized in this study that the *imām* is both a leader and a teacher, or guide to the community. In keeping with this role, during the last moments of Ḥusayn's life he uttered wise counsel in many short sermons. Our sources insist that he felt it to be a duty laid upon him by God, to show his opponents their manifest error in shedding the innocent blood of other Muslims and especially in violating the explicit injunction of the Prophet to love and honor his family after him. He reminded his opposition that the Prophet said, concerning him and his brother Ḥasan, 'They are the two masters of the youths of the people of paradise'; and he offered a long list of still living companions who would have attested to the truth of that statement, which they themselves had heard from the Prophet. Finally, he challenged them to advance a reason for their action. Was it, he asked, in revenge of blood that he had shed or wealth that he had

usurped that now they sought his life? They gave no answer.⁷⁷ He called on some of them by name, showing the letters they had written to him. When they denied it he again spread before them their own letters and those he had received from other Kūfans.

It is unnecessary to reproduce details of valor and self-sacrifice that were supposed to have been exhibited by Ḥusayn's few followers; most sources dwell on them at great length. The men in Ḥusayn's camp were so few that their losses stood out much more conspicuously than those of Ibn Sa'd. By early afternoon, about half the men were killed; and Ḥusayn led the few that remained in the prayer of fear (*ṣalāt al-khawf*).⁷⁸ While Ḥusayn stood to lead the prayers, one of his followers, Sa'īd al-Ḥanafī, stood before him to shield him from the arrows of the enemy. The archers used Sa'īd as a target: riddled with arrows, he fell dead.⁷⁹

Al-Ḥurr had been sent with a thousand men against Ḥusayn. When he heard Ḥusayn's words and saw the uncompromising attitude of Ibn Sa'd and his army, he defected to Ḥusayn's camp with deep remorse and repentance. He stood facing Ibn Sa'd's men and reproached them for killing Ḥusayn and not accepting his peace offers. It was then that Ibn Sa'd himself drew an arrow, and shooting it in the direction of Ḥusayn's camp, said: 'Bear witness for me before the commander (*amīr*) [Ibn Ziyād] that I was the first to shoot an arrow.'⁸⁰ This gave the signal for the fighting to start in earnest. Al-Ḥurr, wishing to expiate his grievous transgression against Ḥusayn, requested to be among the first to die in his defence.

Two further examples must be cited of the chivalry and conviction of the followers of Ḥusayn and their willingness to die with assurance of great reward in the hereafter. Muslim Ibn 'Awsajah, a valiant fighter, fell after a long struggle. When the two groups of fighters separated, Ḥusayn stood over his head and said, 'May God have mercy on you O Muslim, "some of them have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting, and they have not changed in the least. . . ."'⁸¹ Ḥabīb Ibn Muẓāhir, one of the few Kūfans who died with Ḥusayn, approached Muslim and said,

Your death grieves me sorely O Muslim. Were it not that I shall soon follow in your footsteps, I would have asked you to let me

execute your will, and I would have honored your memory as befits a man like you. Rejoice, however, for yours will be the pleasures of paradise.

Muslim answered feebly, pointing to Ḥusayn, 'Yes, I charge you with this man; fight for him until you meet your death before him.'⁸² Both men were well known for their piety and integrity, so much so that their death grieved their enemies as well as their friends.

Late in the afternoon, when Ḥusayn was left with but a few of his friends and family, Ḥanẓalah Ibn Sa'd al-Shāmī⁸³ came forth, faced the people and said:

'My people, I fear for you the like of the day of the parties (*aḥzāb*), the like of the case of Noah's people, 'Ād, Thamūd, and these after them. . . . I fear for you the Day of Invocation, the day you turn about, retreating, having none to defend you from God; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he.'⁸⁴ O people do not kill Ḥusayn lest God crush you with His torments. . . .

Then, despairing, he turned to Ḥusayn and said, 'Shall we not go to the hereafter and join our brethren?' Ḥusayn answered, 'Yes, go to that which is better for you than this world and all that it contains; go to a dominion that shall never cease.'⁸⁵ Ḥanẓalah is important in that he played an interesting role in the development of extremist *Shī'ī* ideas concerning the personality and fate of the martyred *Imām*. Perhaps his words of doom, so powerful in the original Arabic, and full of Qur'ānic allusions, perhaps his otherwise unknown personality or some other unknown reason led him to be chosen to play the role he did. He bore, we are told, the likeness of Ḥusayn and died in his place, as did another man bear the likeness of Jesus and was crucified in his place.⁸⁶

Widespread popular belief holds that before a person's death, that person manifests powers beyond the capacity and comprehension of mortal men. During these final moments, a person acquires unusual clairvoyance and his prayers are quickly answered. Ḥusayn manifested such powers, but in his case they must be attributed not merely to that general phenomenon, but rather to his special favor (*karāmah*) as the *Imām* and friend (*walī*) of God. Several examples are reported of

men who reviled Ḥusayn or challenged his claims for leadership; they were immediately punished through his invocation or curse.⁸⁷

After all the companions of Ḥusayn were killed, his son 'Alī al-Akbar fell; then all his male relatives died in battle one by one. Finally, he was left totally alone. He went to the women's tent and asked for an infant boy born during the journey or not long before.⁸⁸ Ḥusayn took him in his arms and sat at the door of the tent. Some sources, in order to illustrate graphically the cruelty of Ḥusayn's enemies, report that he faced them with the boy in his arms and begged for a drink of water for the dying infant.⁸⁹ The infant in any case was shot by an arrow in the neck. Some sources tell us that Ḥusayn filled his hand with the infant's blood and threw it towards heaven; not a drop returned to earth.⁹⁰ Ḥusayn lifted his hands to heaven and prayed, 'O Lord if Thou hast withheld victory from us from heaven, let that be for our good, and take vengeance for us from these wrongdoers.'⁹¹

It must also be observed that several of the male members of Ḥusayn's family killed in fighting were youths hardly capable of carrying arms. Among these were the two sons of Ḥasan, al-Qāsim and 'Abdallāh. 'Abdallāh, only a boy, stood by his uncle's side after stealing away from the women's tent. A man struck him with a sword, first cutting off his hand, then killing him. Ḥusayn took 'Abdallāh in his arms, still in the throes of death, lamenting the boy's loss and his own impotence to save him.⁹²

One of the few men of Ḥusayn's family present in Karbalā' was his younger half brother al-'Abbās. His death is another moving episode in the tragedy as depicted by later pietistic tradition. It was he, we are told, who was always able to force his way to the waters of the Euphrates to save the lives of the women and children who were languishing with thirst. He was, therefore, given the title, 'the Water Bearer (saqqā') of Karbalā'.⁹³

It has been observed often in this study that *Shī'ī* tradition regards *Imām* Ḥusayn as the paragon of all virtue. His bravery in particular is stressed as beyond all human limitations. The question of Ḥusayn's actual engagement in the fighting is, therefore, important for our understanding of the growth of his personality in Islāmic and especially *Shī'ī* piety. To later developments we shall return subsequently; first we must examine a few of the relevant traditions in the two works

that we have been using for our narrative of Ḥusayn's martyrdom, the history of Ṭabarī and *al-Irshād* of Shaykh al-Mufīd.⁹⁴

The statement which must have served as the basis for later amplifications was given on the authority of a supposed eyewitness of the battle, Ḥamīd b. Muslim. Ḥamīd, although allegedly in the enemy camp, is made to play an important role in staying the violence of the mobs against the women and surviving son of Ḥusayn.⁹⁵ Ḥamīd describes Ḥusayn as he saw him towards the close of the battle:

By God I never saw before an afflicted man [in spite of the fact that his children, members of his family, and friends had been killed] who showed greater fortitude and sharper wit or was braver in his advance than he. By God I never saw, before or after, one like him. For men used to flee before him, on his right and left, as would goats when attacked by a wolf.⁹⁶

Beyond this statement, which in itself says nothing about the actual fighting of Ḥusayn, little is said in most early sources. Ṭabarī reports that Ḥusayn fought at the end on foot for awhile then returned to his place, saying, 'Is it against me that you have gathered? By God, you shall never kill any one of the servants of God for whose death He would be more wrathful with you. . . .'⁹⁷ Almost all sources, early and late ones, quote a statement on the authority of the sixth *Imām* Ja'far that there were found on the body of Ḥusayn thirty-three stabs of the spear and thirty-four strikes with the sword, and his body was riddled with arrows like a porcupine.⁹⁸

It seems that Ḥusayn was killed gradually, so to speak, first by randomly shot arrows, then by wounds inflicted on him by stones and strikes of the swords from those passing by, who did not wish to kill him. Before his death, in anticipation of being robbed of his clothes and left naked, he took Yemenite trousers, tore them open so that no one would want them, and wore them under his clothes. We are told that he was nonetheless robbed of the trousers and actually left naked on the sand.⁹⁹

When at last Ḥusayn was left alone, unable to move, he sat on the ground and uttered a pathetic cry for help:

Is there no one to defend the women of the Apostle of God? Is there not one professing the oneness of God (*muwahḥid*) who would fear

God for our sake? Is there no one to come to our help, seeking thereby that which God has in store as a reward for those who would aid us.¹⁰⁰

Then he filled his hands with his own blood and smeared it all over his head and beard, saying 'Thus will I be until I meet my Lord, stained with my blood. I shall then say [complaining to the Prophet], O Apostle of God this man and that man killed me.'¹⁰¹

As Ḥusayn sat swaying back and forth, unable to move, his sister came out weeping aloud. She turned to Ibn Sa'd and reproached him for allowing her brother to be killed while he just looked on. He turned away, his beard wet with tears, and said nothing. At last Shimr spurred the horsemen on, saying, 'What are you waiting for? Put the man out of his misery.'¹⁰² One man ran and dealt him a blow with his sword which severed his left shoulder. Another man stabbed him in the back and he fell on his face.

It is not clear who finally cut off Ḥusayn's head. According to early sources it was a man called Sinān Ibn Anas al-Nakh'ī. He gave the head, we are told, to Yazīd b. Khawlī al-Aṣḥabī who carried it to Ibn Ziyād.¹⁰³

Ḥusayn's goods were pillaged; even the veils and garments of the women were taken, snatched off their heads and backs. Shimr urged his men to kill 'Alī, the sick youth, but Ḥamīd Ibn Muslim and later Ibn Sa'd intervened and saved the boy. As the women were carried away to Kūfah, they passed the corpses of the dead, still lying on the sand. Zaynab cried out in lamentation:

O my Muḥammad, on you the angels of heaven prayed. Behold Ḥusayn naked under the sky, soiled with his blood and dismembered. O my Muḥammad, your daughters are captives, and your male descendants lying dead blown about by the wind.¹⁰⁴

In this dirge, later *Shī'ī* piety found the first impetus for the *ta'zīyah majālis* tradition. Later tradition tells us that as Zaynab gazed at the dead bodies, she hit her head on the post of her litter, staining her face with the blood of sorrow.¹⁰⁵

When the captives arrived with the heads of the martyrs in Kūfah, Ibn Ziyād gathered the inhabitants of the city to look at the tragic

spectacle. He gazed at Ḥusayn's head, smiling, and began to poke its teeth with a stick he had in his hand. Zayd Ibn Arqam, one of the companions of the Prophet, burst into tears and exclaimed reproachfully, 'Take away your stick from these lips, for by God, often did I see the lips of the Apostle of God on them.' Then he left the hall saying, 'You Arabs are slaves after this day. You have killed the son of Fāṭimah [Ḥusayn] and made Ibn Murjānah [Ibn Ziyād] a ruler over you. He shall kill your best men and spare the worst among you. You have accepted humiliation, fie on those who accept humiliation.'¹⁰⁶ Ibn Ziyād ordered 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, to be killed as he did not wish any male of Ḥusayn's family to survive; but his sickness, youth and the intervention of some of the men present saved him.

Ibn Ziyād sent the captives with the severed heads to Yazīd in Damascus. Yazīd was horrified by the sight of the captives; he ordered that their hands and feet be untied and that they be given clean garments. He lodged them in a house next to his, where for a few days his women and those of Ḥusayn held long lamentations for the dead. Finally he supplied them with provisions and honest men to accompany them, and sent them back to Medina.

We shall have to return to Yazīd at some length later. Now, however, let us retrace our steps to Medina, and briefly follow Ḥusayn a second time to Karbalā' and his family back to Medina. This time, however, our guides will not be historians, but hagiographers. It must be observed that historical accounts are not totally free from hagiographical influence. Nor can it be said that hagiographical works have no historical basis. Such distinctions between genuine history and hagiography were not known to ancient writers. They wrote not as disinterested spectators, but rather as members of a community to whose history and tradition they themselves belonged.

4.3 LATER DEVELOPMENTS AND PIETISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

It can be easily seen from our discussion of some of the aspects of Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the motives that led to it, that there was continuous tension, perhaps in his own mind, but more certainly in the tradition which grew out of his life and death; a tension between

weakness and strength, free choice and determination, and good and evil. The tragic flaw in the character of a hero which usually manifests his human nature is a well-known phenomenon in the history of religion, myth and literature. In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed that the bitter cup of death be taken away from him, but finally he committed his life and will to the divine will. In this submission to the will of God, he transcended the human plane of existence, and thus attained victory on the cross as a divine hero. He was abandoned by God and men, as we see in his cry, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me.'¹⁰⁷ Yet he confidently declared before his crucifixion that if he had so willed, God would have sent legions of angels to defend him.¹⁰⁸ Thus the cross became his throne of glory¹⁰⁹ and the wreath of thorns his crown of victory. These elements of the archetypal life and struggle of the divine hero, as exemplified in Christ, instructively parallel the life and struggle of Ḥusayn, as seen and interpreted by pietistic tradition.

It was observed towards the close of the previous chapter that Ḥusayn approached his impending martyrdom with courage and deep sorrow, a fear of death and love for life, and a truly heroic readiness for death if necessary. Like Jesus, however, he spent his last moments before the final struggle with death in a Gethsemane of sorrow and tears. Early historians and writers of martyrdom narratives (*maqātil*) tell us that Ḥusayn was seen entering the mosque of Medina leaning on two men, suggesting that he may have been ill at the time.¹¹⁰ Physically weak and crushed by a heavy fear of death, Ḥusayn went to the tomb of the Prophet where he spent the last two nights prior to his journey to Mecca. After offering a few prostrations of prayer, he begged God to choose for him that which would be pleasing to Him and His Apostle. He wept bitter tears until he fell asleep with exhaustion at the break of dawn. In a dream he saw the Prophet descend from heaven with a host of angels. The Prophet took Ḥusayn, pressing him close to his breast, and said:

○ Ḥusayn my beloved, I see you soon bathed in your blood, slain in a land of sorrow (*karb*) and calamity (*balā'*) in a group of men of my community. You shall be thirsty but your thirst will not be quenched.¹¹¹

The Prophet then declared that these men, who were to kill his grandson, would beg for his intercession, but it would be denied them on the Day of Resurrection.

Because of the Qur'ān's vivid, concrete descriptions of life in the next world, Islāmic piety generally views life after death as an extension of this life in all its aspects. Thus Ḥusayn, we are told, in a short vision-like dream on the morning before the battle, was told by the Prophet to make haste, for the entire family was expecting to break bread with him (*iftār*) that evening in paradise. The Prophet further said

O Ḥusayn my beloved, behold your father, your mother and your brother have come to visit me, and they are longing for you. Verily you shall have in the Gardens [of Paradise] high stations which you cannot attain save through martyrdom.

Ḥusayn then answered in his dream, 'O grandfather, I have no need of this world; take me therefore to you and let me enter with you into your grave.' But the Prophet insisted, 'No, there is no other choice for you, but that you must return to this world and be granted martyrdom for which God has prescribed for you great rewards.'¹¹²

In a very early tradition, reported on the authority of the fifth *Imām*, we are told that 'God sent down victory to Ḥusayn, until it hung between heaven and earth. Then he [Ḥusayn] was allowed to choose between a victory or meeting God, and he chose the latter.'¹¹³ This is a first step in the development of a tradition that was in the end to make the choice unconditional. The choice changed from one between victory or immediate bliss in the divine presence to a choice between victory or immediate happiness in the company of the Prophet in paradise.¹¹⁴

The last and final step in this development appears in a late tradition. We saw that when Ḥusayn was left alone on the battlefield, he uttered a pathetic cry for help. The angels heard and protested to God that He should not leave His friend (*walī*) so helpless and in such despair. A tablet came down from heaven, the tradition continues, into Ḥusayn's hand. On it was written:

O Ḥusayn, we did not make death and martyrdom an obligation for thee. Thine is the choice, nor would it diminish thy status with us. If thou wishest that we take away from thee this calamity, it shall be granted thee. . . .¹¹⁵

Thereupon hosts of angels, with swords of fire in their hands, filled the entire space between heaven and earth, ready to obey Ḥusayn's command. But he threw the tablet towards heaven, returning it to God with the words,

I would rather be killed and resuscitated seventy times, nay even seventy thousand times, in Thy love and obedience to Thee. . . . Let there be in my death the victory of Thy religion and preservation of Thy law (*sharī'ah*).¹¹⁶

The idea of Ḥusayn's voluntary and unconditional acceptance of martyrdom for the love of God and the preservation of His religion, as evolved by *Shī'ī* piety, while remaining within the Islāmic framework, has pushed the idea of redemption to its extreme limit. It is an interpretation of Ḥusayn's death which has persisted in some form or another to the present.

In another very early tradition, it is related that on his way to Iraq, Ḥusayn met a few men coming from Kūfah to Mecca. They told him that the hearts of the Kūfans were with him, but their swords with the Umayyads. He lifted up his hands to heaven; suddenly the gates of heaven were opened and innumerable troops of angels came down. Ḥusayn said to the men, 'Were it not for the proximity of things and the coming down of the decree of the end, I would have fought them with these [the angels].'¹¹⁷

Another related explanation of Ḥusayn's martyrdom was given by the *Imām* himself to the faithful of the *jinn*. They came to him to offer their support against his enemies, saying they would kill them in an instant without the *Imām* having to move an inch from his place. But Ḥusayn said:

. . . If I remain in my place with what would these miserable creatures be tried, and with what would they be afflicted? Who would occupy my grave, the spot which God has chosen for me when He spread the earth. Then He made it a refuge for our followers, *Shī'ah*, and for those who love us. In it would their prayers and good deeds be accepted, and their petitions answered. It shall be a haven of peace for our *Shī'ah*, a place of safety in this world and the next.¹¹⁸

The tension we witness here is between viewing the martyrdom of Ḥusayn as that of a human being regardless of his status or that of a divine hero whose entire life is preordained. Both aspects are important for *Shī'ī* piety and it is on a balanced presentation of these two aspects, not the rejection of either, that later *Shī'ī* imamology was based. Hence, official *Shī'ī* tradition has insisted on martyrdom as being the common factor in the life of every *imām*. It is, moreover, martyrdom as a common motif that has provided the link between the *imāms* and the community.

Shī'ī theology considers every *imām* a caliph whose temporal power remained unrealized, and only because of human folly. The caliphate of Ḥusayn extended from the day his brother Ḥasan died until his own death. Since the *imām* is not chosen by men but appointed by God himself, his rejection by men in no way annuls his authority: this, for *Shī'ī* theology, would be tantamount to thwarting the divine will. We are therefore told that before his departure for Iraq, Ḥusayn was seen standing at the gates of the *Ka'bah*, with Gabriel's hand in his, the angel exclaiming for all to hear, 'Hasten to the *bay'ah* [giving of allegiance] of God.'¹¹⁹

It must be observed that not only the death of the *imām* but the details of his life are divinely controlled. More specifically, however, every *imām* had a program, as it were, which he had to complete before his death. This is clearly expressed in an unusual tradition. The Prophet received divine communications (*waḥī*) as words recited, not written; this applies both to the Qur'ān and to what we may call 'divine utterances' (*aḥādīth qudsīyyah*). *Shī'ī* tradition, however, asserts that the Prophet received one and only one document (*waṣīyyah*) from God, intended for the *imāms*. The holy writ had twelve seals, one for each *imām*. Each one broke his own seal and lived by its injunctions. That of Ḥusayn read, 'Fight, and you shall be killed. Rise up in revolt with a company of men to martyrdom, for they shall have no martyrdom except with you.'¹²⁰

The battle of Karbalā' is considered by *Shī'ī* piety to be as important in the religious history of Muslims as the battle of Badr; its martyrs are as well favored by God as those of Badr.¹²¹ The martyrs of Badr, we are told, were supported by hosts of angels.¹²² Those same angels came to Ḥusayn on his way from Medina to Mecca and offered to lend him

support, as they had been commanded by God. But he told them to witness his death and guard his tomb until the coming of the *qā'im*, the *Mahdī*.¹²³

According to a very popular yet not so widespread tradition, God is supposed to have chosen one thousand men who would protect His religion (*dīn*) from the beginning of the world until its end. Ḥusayn, when asked concerning the distribution of these men in time, said that the companions of Ṭālūt¹²⁴ were three hundred and thirteen, likewise those that fought in Badr were three hundred and thirteen. At the end of time, a similar number of men will support the *Mahdī*. That leaves only sixty-one men, these were the companions of Ḥusayn.¹²⁵ Thus the men who fought and died with Ḥusayn were chosen by God for this honor before the creation of the world. They faced death, impervious to the pain of the sharp steel, for God protected them against pain as he did the martyrs of Badr.¹²⁶

God, we are told, removed the veil from their eyes so they saw their places in paradise. They fought, therefore, valiantly, longing for the pleasures awaiting them in paradise.¹²⁷ They even tasted these joys before their death, as we read in one of the most curious traditions attributed to the sixth *Imām*. When the companions of Ḥusayn were suffering terrible thirst on the day before the fighting, Ḥusayn gathered them together and said, 'Let him who is thirsty approach.' So one by one they came and he put his thumb in the mouth of each man until they all drank. Some among them exclaimed, 'By God, we drank a drink, the likes of which no one in this world had ever tasted before.'¹²⁸ The tradition goes on to relate that Ḥusayn gathered his companions again in the evening and caused a great table to be spread before them laden with the foods and beverages of paradise, from which they all ate and drank. Then he sent them all away, each to his own home; he himself went to Mount Raḍwah near Mecca where he shall remain until the coming of the *Mahdī*.¹²⁹ The imagination of later *Shī'ī* writers stopped at nothing, least of all glaring contradictions among traditions, in their effort to emphasize the miraculous, even fantastic aspects of the passion of the martyred *Imām*.

When Ḥusayn was left alone on the battlefield, he felt the deep despair of an abandoned man in the face of death. To his outcry of despair, his companions, already dead, were said to have stirred again,

begging the *Imām* to be brought back to life so that they might again die in his defence. But that was not to be; rather the *Imām* must endure the full measure of his suffering and drink the cup of martyrdom to the full. Satan came to Karbalā' with his armies, challenging God that if Ḥusayn were to be tried by the intense heat of the desert sun, he would surely break down under the stress. God increased the heat of the sun seventy times; only Satan and Ḥusayn could feel it. Of course, Ḥusayn stood unmoved, and Satan and his hosts ran away distraught and defeated.¹³⁰ This is a late tradition; it presents an obvious parallel with the temptations of the Buddha and, indirectly, those of Christ. Like them, Ḥusayn had to achieve his victory through suffering; the greater the trials, the greater the victory. Satan, we are told, wanted to prevent Ḥusayn's death from becoming a redemptive martyrdom and a protection against the fire for all who would weep for his death and keep his memory.¹³¹

We saw in Chapter 1 of this study how animals, often more than human beings, could express loyalty and sorrow in their participation in the sufferings of the Holy Family. The horse, in particular, has been regarded in Arab culture as the noblest and most intelligent of all animals, much more than just a vehicle for its warrior rider. The horse is his companion in the fighting, whose strength and faithfulness determine in large measure the rider's victory. The idea of the empty stirrup, as a dramatic expression of sorrow for the fallen fighter, is also widespread. Ḥusayn, we are told, rode the horse of the Apostle of God to the battlefield. When he died, that horse began to weep bitterly, neighing, 'O the wrong committed by an unfaithful community against the people of the household (*ahl al-bayt*) of its Prophet.'¹³² The horse, according to a late tradition, began to smear its head and mane with the blood of the dead *Imām* and beat its head on the ground with sorrow. Ibn Sa'd, amazed by the sight, ordered his men to catch the animal. But the horse would let no one come near it; in its struggle against the enemy army, it killed forty men. Finally it galloped towards the women's tent with tears running down its face. Zaynab saw it and called Ḥusayn's favorite young daughter Sukaynah, saying, 'Come out, here comes your father with the water.' Of course, the young girl came out, and, seeing the horse without a rider, raised a lament in a moving dirge-like stanza. The horse died as it

continued to beat its head on the ground in grief for its master.¹³³

Popular tradition claims Shimr to be the murderer of Ḥusayn; many sources portray this last act of cruelty vividly. Quite early in the development of this tradition, Shimr's personality becomes particularly conspicuous among Ḥusayn's antagonists. He was, tradition asserts, leprous, with a face like that of a dog.¹³⁴ In spite of many historical references to the contrary, popular tradition could find no one more evil than Shimr to whom the final act of killing Ḥusayn could be ascribed. We shall not trace the long development of the Shimr tradition, so to speak, in popular *Shī'ī* religious literature; it is enough to cite a recent account which may be taken as quite typical of most tales since the seventeenth century, at the latest. *

The picture here presented of Ḥusayn is anything but that of a brave and dignified warrior. We see him lying on the sand, painfully contracting and stretching his limbs, calling on God for help and vengeance on his enemies. Hearing him, Shimr suggests that he should be killed in case God might indeed answer his invocations. Early sources suggest that Yazīd b. Khawālī al-Aṣḥabāhī came to slay Ḥusayn, but his hands trembled, and that Sinān mocked him and himself cut off Ḥusayn's head. The later tradition tells us that Yazīd looked into Ḥusayn's eyes and was frightened: they were like the eyes of the Prophet and 'Alī. Finally, Shimr came, knelt on Ḥusayn's breast and began to revile him. Ḥusayn asked to see his face and smiled, telling Shimr that the Prophet had told him that someone with physical characteristics like his would cut off his head. Of course, Shimr became furious and put the sword to Ḥusayn's throat, but it did not cut: he had touched the blessed spot that the Prophet used to kiss. Ḥusayn reminded the evil man that the world was ephemeral and the hereafter eternal; whatever reward he could expect for killing him would be little compared with the punishment in the world to come. But Shimr professed unbelief (*kufr*), turned the *Imām* over on his face, and slew him from the back of the neck.¹³⁵

Men swarmed around the body of Ḥusayn after he fell. All those who robbed him of his clothes or other goods met a bad end. His old trousers, for example, were taken by a man whose hands began to wither in the summer, like two dried faggots, and to become damp in the winter, oozing pus and blood until he died. So it was with every-

one who pillaged Ḥusayn's goods. When Ḥusayn's camels were later slaughtered for food, their meat turned to fire or was too bitter to eat.¹³⁶

One interesting example that has been highly dramatized in the *ta'zīyah* passion plays in Iran is the legend of Ḥusayn's camel driver.¹³⁷ Ḥusayn had, we are told, a very expensive sash (*tikkah*) which the camel driver had always coveted. The story assumes, unlike other accounts, that Ḥusayn was not left naked. The evil camel driver came on the night Ḥusayn was killed and began to untie the sash. Ḥusayn's corpse miraculously stretched out its hand and grasped the sash so as not to allow the man to untie it and leave the body totally exposed. The camel driver cut off first one hand, then the other, as Ḥusayn tried again to protect his body from being uncovered. As the man was about to remove the sash, the sky became bright and hosts of angels came down with the Prophet, Fāṭimah, 'Alī and Ḥasan. The Prophet uttered an invocation, and the head of his martyred grandson flew from Kūfah and was once again placed on its body. The Prophet noticed that Ḥusayn's hands were cut off and Ḥusayn told him what the wicked camel driver had done. The Prophet cursed the man, saying, 'O God, cut off his hands and feet, blind his eyes and blacken his face and never forgive him.'¹³⁸ The man was later seen outside the *Ka'bah*, weeping and praying for divine forgiveness but knowing that it would never be granted him.

Shī'ī tradition, as we have seen, presents conflicting reports of Yazīd's treatment of the surviving members of Ḥusayn's family. Like Ibn Ziyād, Yazīd is supposed to have picked the teeth of the severed head of Ḥusayn, and was reproached by one of the companions of the Prophet with harsh words similar to those addressed to Ibn Ziyād.¹³⁹ Yazīd's infidelity and wickedness are indicated by a few verses attributed to him by popular piety, recited as he gleefully gazed at the head before him. In these verses, Yazīd wished that his ancestors of Badr were present to see how he had amply avenged them. He concludes,

Forsooth the sons of Hāshim played with power (*mulk*), for neither a word came [from God] nor was a revelation sent. I would not therefore be a true descendant of Khindaf [his ancestral tribe] if I would not take revenge on the house of Aḥmad [Muḥammad] for all that he had done.¹⁴⁰

In one of the many orations attributed to Zaynab, Ḥusayn's sister, she reprimands Yazīd harshly for his infidelity in harkening back to the blood ties of the days of the *jāhiliyyah* and pronounces his imminent doom.¹⁴¹

A man of Damascus then in Yazīd's court saw Fāṭimah the younger, Ḥusayn's daughter; thinking the captives to be from a non-Muslim country, he requested her of Yazīd as a concubine. The young girl was frightened and clung to her aunt for protection. Zaynab again reproached Yazīd and told the man that Yazīd could not do such a thing unless he renounced Islām altogether. The incident is reported by many very early authors;¹⁴² here tradition displays all the possibilities of a vivid imagination. After an exchange of harsh words between Yazīd and the *Imām's* sister, Yazīd berated the man and the matter was dropped. But later tradition makes the man ask who the captives actually were; when he learns of their identity, he curses Yazīd and is killed.¹⁴³ In a still later tradition the man himself is cursed by Umm Kulthūm, a younger sister of Ḥusayn, for his audacity; immediately, as she had specified in her invocation, his tongue was muted (literally, *cut off*), his eyes blinded and his limbs paralyzed.¹⁴⁴

Another very popular and richly varied genre of anecdotes concerns traditions of Jews and Christians who happened to be present at the time of Ḥusayn's martyrdom. As they learn of what Yazīd did to the family of the Prophet, they curse him, accept Islām and are martyred.¹⁴⁵ One of these, a Christian of Medina, had met the Prophet when Ḥusayn was yet a child and witnessed the wrestling episode already discussed.¹⁴⁶ He relates this event to Yazīd, making the point that neither the Prophet, the parents of the *Imām* nor even God himself would have broken Ḥusayn's heart by declaring him to be weaker than his brother, so what Yazīd had done was a grievous sin indeed. The man declared that for all these years he and his large family had kept their Islām secret. He professed Islām publicly and rushed to the head of Ḥusayn, embracing it and weeping as Yazīd had him beheaded.¹⁴⁷

In his short reign of a little over three years, Yazīd, according to general Islāmic tradition,¹⁴⁸ first killed Ḥusayn, then had his army pillage Medina, rape its women and kill its men, and finally destroyed the *Ka'bah* in the war against Ibn al-Zubayr. Later Yazīd is said to have

come to a bad end. Graphic descriptions reveal how his life was always haunted by guilt after the death of Ḥusayn. On one of his hunting trips he was chasing a gazelle specifically sent by God; he fell off his horse and was dragged by the animal until only his left leg was left hanging in the stirrup. When he died devils came and dragged his soul into the lowest pit of hell.¹⁴⁹

One of Yazīd's wives, Hind, who was previously married to Husayn, saw light shining from the head of her former husband in a dream. Then a large number of angels came down from heaven, saluting the head and weeping. The Prophet came and threw himself over the severed head, weeping and saying, 'O my son, they have killed you, knowing not who you were, and prevented you from drinking water.'¹⁵⁰ She went looking for Yazīd and found him in a dark house with bowed head and saddened countenance. She related the dream to him; despondent and frightened, he sent the captives back to Medina with rich gifts.

It has been repeatedly stressed in this study that nature, as well as celestial and terrestrial creation, have been integrated into the drama of Muḥarram through the familiar phenomenon of supernatural portents and signs accompanying the birth or death of a hero. It is hardly necessary to give examples or draw parallels between the case of Ḥusayn and those of other spiritual heroes. When Ḥusayn died, we are told, the heavens darkened and the sun was eclipsed so that the stars were seen in mid-day. The stars collided; a strong wind arose, blowing so much dust about that nothing could be seen. People thought that the end of the world had come, and with it their own torments.¹⁵¹ Not only signs and portents accompanied the death of Ḥusayn, but also a mark of nature's sorrow was left forever in the sky as a reminder of that grave event. It is related, in very early sources, that redness at sunset was never seen in the sky before Ḥusayn threw his blood towards heaven.¹⁵²

On their way from the battlefield, the captives passed through the streets of Kūfah. Various speeches are attributed to the women and the surviving son of Ḥusayn. Very early sources attribute a speech to the lady of the house of 'Alī, Zaynab. But like all such speeches, the powerful rhetoric of this oration can be fully appreciated only in the Arabic original.¹⁵³ In it she declares, '. . . You have truly committed a

great wrong. Behold the heavens are nigh splitting asunder, the earth will nearly split open, and the mountains collapse. . . . Do you then marvel that the heavens have rained blood? . . .'¹⁵⁴ To what extent these remarks can be said to have influenced the Muḥarram tradition is difficult to say with any certainty. For later developments, this and other such orations must have served as texts for many ideas. Moreover, this oration and several others, attributed to Zaynab and others of the family of Ḥusayn on their way from Karbalā' to Kūfah, to Damascus and back to Medina, developed as part of the general tradition. Thus, as Zaynab declared the heavens to have rained blood, so, according to most sources, it continued to rain blood for forty days or even six months. Ṭabarī reports, on the authority of a man contemporary to Ḥusayn who took an active part against him, that every morning people saw blood on the walls of their houses, and often found their household vessels filled with it.¹⁵⁵ This blood from heaven is regarded by some as tears the celestial regions shed for Ḥusayn. The earth likewise wept, and blood was seen under every stone and on every wall.¹⁵⁶

Ḥusayn, as we have seen, was killed by men who were supposed to have been Muslims; some among them were the sons of close companions of the Prophet. Tradition seeks to contrast the character of these men with those men and women who are complete strangers to both the community and the religion of Islām. These unfaithful Muslims are even contrasted with animals and birds, who showed more sorrow for the tragedy. We are told that when Ḥusayn died, birds ceased their happy music and stopped eating and drinking for days.¹⁵⁷ A raven, who witnessed the fighting, came down and smeared its plumage with the sacred blood and flew to Medina. There it alighted on the wall of Fāṭimah, daughter of Ḥusayn, and began to weep. In many cultures the raven is an omen of death; in Middle Eastern cultures in particular, it symbolizes the angel of death. In a dialogue between the bird and Fāṭimah, the sorrowful bird mournfully announced to her the death of her father. Looking at the bird she said:

The raven tells sad news! I asked, 'Woe to you O raven, whose death do you announce?' It said, 'The *Imām*'s.' 'Who?', I said. It answered, 'He who is guided aright. Behold Ḥusayn is in Karbalā' among

spears and lances.' 'Who, Ḥusayn!' said I. 'Yes,' it answered. 'He lies on the sands.' Then it spread its wings and flew away unable to utter another word.¹⁵⁸

It has been observed that the blood of Ḥusayn is regarded by *Shī'ī* piety as a source of both healing and judgment. Many traditions tell of men who had taken part in some way, directly or indirectly, in the murder of Ḥusayn; they dream that the Prophet rubs their eyes with his blood and they wake up totally blind.¹⁵⁹ The tales of healing and guidance, on the other hand, are full of emotion and tender sentiment. They show that universal healing and goodness can be achieved through suffering and sorrow.

There is a story which is supposed to have been transmitted on the authority of the family of the Prophet, *ahl al-bayt*.¹⁶⁰ It is the story of a Jew of Medina who had a daughter who was blind and crippled. Every night her father took her to a garden outside the city, trying to comfort her. One night he left her in the garden and returned to the city on an errand. On a tree near her, the girl heard the mournful sound of a bird, and she responded with her own sad cries and tears. As she continued to join the sorrowful cry of the bird, she slowly crawled nearer to the tree. The bird was smeared with Ḥusayn's blood. A drop of that blood fell first on her eyes and they were opened; another fell on her hands, then her feet and she was completely healed.

Her father returned, anxious over having left her alone for so long, and was alarmed at not finding his invalid daughter. Instead, he saw a young girl merrily playing among the flowers of the garden. With wonderment and joy, the man saw the bird and prayed in the name of all the Holy prophets of Israel that God might give it the power of speech so that he could learn what had happened. The bird spoke and told him that it had witnessed the death of Ḥusayn and stained itself with his blood. Then it had flown to a group of white birds like it who were gathered in a garden, eating and filling the air with their music. As it announced to them the awful news, their joy turned into mourning. So the bird had flown to Medina in order to mourn the martyred *Imām* in his own city.

In Islāmic history, and especially in *Shī'ī* piety, the head of Ḥusayn played a role closely analogous to that of the cross in early and

medieval Christian history. The Fāṭimids made it the crown of their great empire in Egypt, where the shrine which is supposed to house it stands to this day as the mosque of Ḥusayn.¹⁶¹

As the head was paraded through the streets of Kūfah, the crowds passed by the house of Zayd Ibn Arqam. Zayd heard the head recite, 'Or dost thou think the Men of the Cave and al-Rakeem were among our signs of a wonder?'¹⁶² Zayd's hair stood on end. He exclaimed, 'Your head, O son of the Apostle of God, is a greater wonder still.'¹⁶³

In many closely related tales, we are told of Christian monks or pious Jews, usually rabbis, who encountered the head and were struck with wonderment. Such a person would ask for the head to be with him for the night; the head would speak to him, he would embrace Islām, and it would accept him as a new member of the community.¹⁶⁴ One example serves well to illustrate this interesting genre.

Ḥusayn's head, according to popular tradition, was sent to Damascus in a large company of bodyguards to make sure that it would get to Yazīd. On the way, the caravan stopped for the night below a hermitage where a Christian monk lived, spending his life in solitary worship. As they sat down for dinner, a hand wrote on the wall with letters of blood, 'Would a community that had killed Ḥusayn hope for the intercession of his grandfather on the Day of Reckoning?'¹⁶⁵ The monk looked down and saw the writing on the wall and the head surrounded by an aura of bright light. He offered Ibn Sa'd ten thousand dinars to keep the head for the night. He took the head and, with it pressed to his bosom, spent the night weeping. Before the break of dawn he addressed the head, saying, 'O head, I now possess nothing else save my own person. Bear witness for me before God and your grandfather that I bear witness that there is no God but God.'¹⁶⁶ He embraced Islām and dedicated the rest of his life to the service of the Holy Family.

Near Damascus Ibn Sa'd called for the money and found the coins had turned into pieces of clay instead of gold. On one side was written, 'Deem not that God is heedless of what the evildoers work', and on the other, '. . . and those who do wrong shall surely know by what overturning they will be overturned'.¹⁶⁷ Ibn Sa'd had the coins thrown into the river and was himself filled with deep remorse.¹⁶⁸

Those who carried the head were considered to be no less wicked

than those who committed the original evil deed. Tradition reports that they put the head before them in a coffin and sat drinking wine, thus committing a double offence: a breach of sacred law and irreverence toward the *Imām*. As the men slept one night, the Prophet came down with a large troop of angels to lament over the head. The angel Gabriel struck each of the men with a lance of fire, killing them all except one who happened to be awake at the time. The man protested that he did not take part in the actual fighting against Ḥusayn, but the Prophet answered, 'No matter, but you have increased the number of men against him.' The man begged for pardon, but the Prophet smeared his eyes with the blood of Ḥusayn and said to him, 'Go away, may God never forgive you.' The man woke up blind.¹⁶⁹

The head of Ḥusayn has been the subject of much pious hagiographical imagination. A final tradition carries this long process to its ultimate limit. When the head and its guards reached Damascus, Yazīd lodged them in a special dome. One night, the Prophet, with all the earlier prophets and many angels, came down and wept much for the wrong done the descendants of the last Prophet, Muḥammad. Gabriel wanted to shake the earth from its foundations to kill all of its inhabitants. But the Prophet restrained him, saying that he would be able to contend with Ḥusayn's murderers on the Day of Judgment. Again, in this version of the story, all the men guarding the head were killed by the angel except one who remained to tell the tale. Finally, prophets and angels went up to heaven carrying the head with them. So the head was never seen again, and the story was kept secret by Yazīd.¹⁷⁰

This tale leads us to consider yet another theme in the complex tradition concerning Ḥusayn's death. We insisted in our discussion in Chapter 2 concerning the personality and physical characteristics of the *imāms* that they cannot be regarded as mere human beings. The question, therefore, of what Ḥusayn's death actually meant in the light of the *Shī'ī* concept of the *imām* cannot be given an easy answer. This question has been answered in different ways at different times. There have been those who accepted the death of Ḥusayn with all the sorrow and emotional involvement possible, simply as a tragedy in the history of Islām. This tragedy has its lessons for human life, to be sure; it was the result of human folly, the fruits of which were already reaped in this world and will be again reaped in the world to come. This view, in

varying degrees, has been the one accepted by the *Sunnī* majority, and is becoming more and more dominant among *Shī'īs* as well.¹⁷¹

On the other hand, some *Shī'īs* have accepted the bodily death of *Imām Ḥusayn*, but consider the *imāms* to be made of a non-material substance and assert further that in this non-material or luminous body, *Imām Ḥusayn* ascended to heaven.¹⁷² This non-material body is known as *al-jism al-barzakhī*. It is a luminous body of a sort which is neither material nor merely a spirit. Rather, it is in between the two: a middle substance, so to speak, as the word *barzakh* (barrier) itself signifies.

Finally, some have asserted unequivocally that *Ḥusayn* did not die, but was taken up to heaven, and that his likeness was assumed by someone else.¹⁷³ This position is rejected by the *Ithnā'asharī* (Twelver) *Shī'īs*. The sixth *Imām* was asked what he thought of those who held such a view. He answered, 'These are liars . . . for they have given the lie to the Prophet and the *imāms* after him, in saying *Ḥusayn* was not killed. . . . These are not of my community (*Shī'ah*) and I am innocent of them.'¹⁷⁴ This group has been regarded by Twelver *Shī'īs* as extremists (*ghulāt*) and delegators (*mufawwiḍah*); the sixth *Imām* concludes his statement by cursing the *ghulāt* and *mufawwiḍah*.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, it is related on the authority of the twelfth *Imām*, as transmitted by his first representative (*wakīl*): 'As for those who claim that *Ḥusayn* was not killed this is infidelity (*kufṛ*) lying and straying away (*ḍalālāh*) from the right.'¹⁷⁶

The objection made by the sixth *Imām* to the view that *Ḥusayn* was not killed is based mainly on the fact that since the Prophet and the *imāms* after him foretold *Ḥusayn's* death, then it would make them liars to deny it, and that is *kufṛ*. No particular fact in the death of *Imām Ḥusayn* nor any specific doctrinal consideration prompted the sixth *Imām* to curse the people of this view, but rather the view that Prophets and *imāms* enjoy protection (*iṣmah*) from all error necessitates his strong objection. But when the question was put more indirectly by one of his followers, Ibn Bakīr, as to whether anything would be found in *Ḥusayn's* tomb, the *Imām* did not answer the question directly. He said angrily, '. . . *Ḥusayn* is with his father, mother and brother in the house of the Apostle of God, and with him together they are sustained and made to rejoice. . . .'¹⁷⁷

It is further related that when the Prophet was taken up to heaven, he saw in the fifth heaven an image of 'Alī which God made for the angels so that they would be able to visit 'Alī and see him as did the people of this world. Thus when Ibn Muljam struck him on the head with a sword, that appeared in the heavenly image as well. When Ḥusayn was killed, the angels carried him up to the fifth heaven still stained with his fresh blood, and stood him up alongside the image of his father. They will remain in this position till the Day of Resurrection. It is interesting to observe that the narrator of this tradition concludes with the injunction of the sixth *Imām*, ' . . . this [*ḥadīth*] is one of the treasured secrets of knowledge, do not therefore disclose it save to those for whom it is intended'.¹⁷⁸

We have attempted in this chapter to study as closely as possible the early accounts of Ḥusayn's struggle and death, as well as how some of the major scenes of his death evolved in Islāmic and, more specifically, *Shī'ī* piety. The tragic death of Ḥusayn, the third *Imām* of the *Shī'ī* community, has become for *Shī'ī* Muslims a cosmic event touching all of human history, nature, the entire universe. Ḥusayn's martyrdom, moreover, was integrated very early into the history of revelation, more specifically into the traditions of the ancient biblical prophets and the Christ of the Gospel. Ṭabarī relates, according to a very early tradition,¹⁷⁹ that a Jewish *savant* of the line of the Prophet David (*Ra's al-Jālūt*) used to run every time he and his companions passed through Karbalā'. He knew that the son of a prophet was to be killed in that spot, and he was afraid of being that victim. Thus when Ḥusayn was killed, *Ra's al-Jālūt* concluded with relief that the person intended in the ancient books, presumably the sacred scriptures of the Jews, was Ḥusayn, not himself. After Ḥusayn was killed, moreover, people heard a voice in Medina, assumed to be the ancient prophet al-Khiḍr or one of the angels, reciting the following verses:

O you who killed Ḥusayn ignorantly, anticipate great torment and mutilation [that is, in the world to come]. All the denizens of heaven curse you; angels, apostles, and martyrs. You have been cursed by the tongue of Moses, David and the man of the Gospel.¹⁸⁰

It must be emphasized again that the line of demarcation between what modern scholarship considers as historical accounts and what is

regarded as hagiography or pious legend cannot be drawn so clearly when considering ancient and medieval sources. Historians have reported much concerning Ḥusayn's death which cannot be accepted as purely historical information. What criterion, then, must the historian, and especially the historian of religion, use in examining the various traditions purporting to relate an event of great significance for the religious life of so many people over so many centuries, such as the martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn? It will not do, in our view, to limit ourselves to the bare facts as we see them, because even they have to be arbitrarily chosen. Nor can we, to be sure, take all traditions to be factual data. We must, however, choose our facts, often including those facts which, while to us they do not seem historically valid, were nonetheless considered as such by the community we are studying. Let us give two examples to illustrate our points.

For their assessment of what actually happened in Karbalā' on the tenth of Muḥarram in the year 60 A.H., some modern scholars have relied almost exclusively on a single statement by a man who himself was supposed to have taken part in what happened.¹⁸¹ The statement in question appears in most early *Shī'ī* as well as *Sunnī* sources. *Zaḥr* Ibn Qays, who carried the head of Ḥusayn to Yazīd, greeted the Umayyad ruler with these succinct words:

Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī came to us with eighteen men of his family and a small following of his supporters: we asked them to choose between submission to Ibn Ziyād or fighting and they chose fighting. We came upon them at sunrise and surrounded them from every side. Soon swords were wielded on both sides, but they began to run away from us, hiding among the hills and valleys as would doves fleeing before the falcon. By God, O Prince of the Faithful, it was not longer than mid-day nap or the time it would take to milk an ewe until we finished the last of them. Behold their corpses exposed, and their garments blood-stained and their cheeks soiled.¹⁸²

On the basis of this statement these scholars have discounted all other traditions concerning the duration of the battle, and, with it, any significance attached to the event by the society in which Ḥusayn lived and enjoyed a special place of honor. Furthermore, since the statement is reported by the great historian al-Ṭabarī, it was considered by them

as a normative one. Ṭabarī himself, however, sought not only to report events, but to preserve traditions as well. It must also be observed that the statement under consideration tells us very little beyond its rich Arabic rhetoric. Ṭabarī's method of including as evidence many different accounts could be very instructive to modern objective scholars. In effect, it assumes that the true story of an event, which is its history, cannot be reduced to a few facts. To this must be added the further caution that we cannot so confidently arrive at final conclusions from these few facts.

Early historians, such as Ṭabarī, base their account to a large extent on the oral transmission of information. It must be asked, therefore, whose authority must be taken for the true account, especially by scholars so far removed in time and place from the transmitters. This question, as we know, has occupied Muslim *ḥadīth* traditionists and historians for many centuries. For *Shī'īs*, of course, the *imāms* are the main transmitters of all sacred traditions. The death of Ḥusayn belongs, for *Shī'īs*, not just to history, but to sacred tradition as well.

We have observed that there was wide disagreement on the number of men who took part in the fighting on both sides. This disparity has in part arisen, we believe, from a very early tradition reporting that Ḥusayn one day went to see his brother Ḥasan shortly before the latter's last illness. Ḥusayn wept for his brother's situation and impending death, as the two brothers knew what was to happen to them in the future. Ḥasan is supposed to have answered that he would be given poison to drink which would kill him.¹⁸³ 'Yet', he continued, 'there is no day like yours, O Abū 'Abdallāh [that is, Ḥusayn], as thirty thousand men will come against you, yet all claiming to be of the community of our grandfather Muḥammad, and professing the faith of Islām. They shall agree on shedding your blood, violating your sanctity, carrying off your women and children as captives, and pilgaging your goods. . . .'¹⁸⁴

This statement, which goes on to tell how all things were to mourn Ḥusayn's death, contains, from the *Shī'ī* point of view, a summary not only of events but of their consequences also; so many *Shī'ī* writers have considered this tradition to be as reliable as the report of an eyewitness. Even though we may not accept this as our own methodology, we must recognize its importance for the piety of a

community which has interiorized the event and made it the basis of the hopes and aspirations of its members.

To this end *Shī'ī* piety has often confused history with legend,¹ using the former at best as a peg, so to speak, on which to hang many religious feelings and ideas. In a tradition reported by Kulaynī from the fifth *Imām*, he is supposed to have cautioned his followers that if they heard a *ḥadīth* concerning the family of Muḥammad and found it too difficult to believe, they should not reject it. They should rather submit the judgment of its veracity to the Prophet and the *imāms*.¹⁸⁵ As can be easily seen throughout this study, the followers of the *Imām* have not disappointed him in their credulity and acceptance of *ḥadīths* extremely difficult for anyone to believe. How many of these traditions actually come from the *imāms*, and how much was put into their mouths by faithful followers, is difficult for us to tell with certainty. We are left to end this chapter, in the face of so many uncertainties, with the familiar words with which many Muslim writers concluded: 'Thus we have heard, and God knows best.'

The Sigh of the Sorrowful *Nafas al-Mahmūm*¹

The martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn has been regarded by the *Shīʿī* community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves. Furthermore, this event has been regarded as divinely preordained: through it God's justice and mercy are manifested, and hence man's redemption and condemnation are achieved. It was stated at the outset of this discussion that, in some way, all suffering may be regarded as a means of human redemption. This redemptive suffering as manifested in the tragedy of Muḥarram, has been viewed in two ways. First, the death of Ḥusayn has been regarded as a sacrifice in the struggle (*jihād*) in the way of God for the right against the wrong, for justice and truth against wrongdoing and falsehood. Ḥusayn has '...redeemed the religion (*dīn*) of his grandfather with his soul, family and children. . . .'² Through his death, moreover, the foundations of the Umayyad kingdom crumbled. Ḥusayn died, as we saw in the previous chapter, in order that Islām might be preserved as an ideal to inspire all subsequent generations of Muslims to strive for its realization.

The second way in which Ḥusayn's death may be regarded as a redemptive act is through the participation of the faithful in the sorrows of the *Imām* and his beloved family. It will be seen, moreover, that not only mankind, but all creation as well, is called upon to participate in this tragic event. We have often emphasized this point; it will be the aim of this chapter to study in detail the various means of this participation.

We shall first examine traditions asserting the great merit of weeping for Ḥusayn's calamity and the participation of all things in mourning his death. Secondly, we shall discuss the means of commemorating this tragedy through an examination of the *ta'zīyah majālis* celebration, discussing briefly the development of the *ta'zīyah majālis* (memorial services) and describing a typical *ta'zīyah majālis*. In the third part of this chapter we shall consider the place of poetry in the

Muḥarram ritual. We shall first discuss the special merit of composing and reciting poetry in memory of Ḥusayn, then we shall analyze at some length a few of the major themes, techniques and structures of this special genre of literature. Finally, we shall deal at some length with the *zīyārah* (pilgrimage) ritual, its performance, and some of the main themes in the *zīyārah* literature. In the appendix to this chapter (Appendix D), we shall give a partial translation of a *ta'zīyah majlis*, some examples of Persian elegies, and selections from the text of an important *zīyārah* prayer.

5.1 THE MERIT OF WEEPING FOR ḤUSAYN

In Islāmic tradition *jihād* or the struggle in the way of God, whether as armed struggle, or any form of opposition of the wrong, is generally regarded as one of the essential requirements of a person's faith as a Muslim. *Shī'ī* tradition carried this requirement a step further, making *jihād* one of the pillars or foundations (*arkān*) of religion.³ If, therefore, Ḥusayn's struggle against the Umayyad regime must be regarded as an act of *jihād*, then, in the mind of devotees, the participation of the community in his suffering and its ascent to the truth of his message must also be regarded as an extension of the holy struggle of the *Imām* himself. The *ḥadīth* from which we took the title of this chapter states this point very clearly. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is said to have declared to al-Mufaḍḍal, one of his closest disciples, 'The sigh of the sorrowful for the wrong done us is an act of praise (*tasbīḥ*) [of God], his sorrow for us is an act of worship, and his keeping of our secret is a struggle (*jihād*) in the way of God'; the *Imām* then added, 'This *ḥadīth* should be inscribed in letters of gold.'⁴

As one of the essentials of faith, *jihād* must be regarded as an act of worship, bringing high rewards in the hereafter with God. Thus *Shī'ī* sources speak of the reward (*thawāb*) for weeping for the sufferings and afflictions of the Holy Family and especially for the death of the martyred *Imām* Ḥusayn.⁵

The *Imām* himself declared, we are told, 'I am the martyr of tears (*qatīl al-'ibrah*), no man of faith remembers me but that he weeps.'⁶ But for those who do indeed remember Ḥusayn's calamity and weep for it,

again the *Imām* is said to have promised, 'There is no servant (*abd*) whose eyes shed one drop of tears for us, but that God will grant him for it the reward of the countless ages in paradise.'⁷ Weeping is to be a reminder to the faithful of the sufferings of the *imāms*; it is the remembrance more than the weeping that is important. Thus we read that the sixth *Imām* said, 'Anyone who remembers us or if we are mentioned in his presence, and a tear as small as the wing of a gnat falls from his eye, God would forgive all his sins even if they were as the foam of the sea.'⁸ We shall often have to return to this theme in this chapter. The point we wish to stress, however, is that after the death of *Imām* Ḥusayn, both the *imāms* and their followers lived in fear and had to propagate their teachings in secret. It was no longer easy to express their opposition to Umayyad and later 'Abbāsīd rule through armed struggle. (The only vehicle was the secret, yet active, participation in the sufferings of *ahl al-bayt* through weeping and other means of remembrance.)

The first to provide a powerful example of this incessant sorrow was the fourth *Imām*, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn. The emphasis on sorrowful remembrance of the great tragedy of Karbalā¹ owes its beginning to him, for he himself lived this tragedy to its bitter end. It was he who first carried this expression of sorrow from a mere shedding of tears into an actual participation of the faithful, not only in the sorrows of the *Imām*, but also in their persecutions: In a classic statement attributed to him, he first declares that whoever weeps for the death of his father, Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī, God would grant him large mansions in paradise to live therein eternally. He goes on to say:

{ . . . and any man of faith (*mu'min*) whose eyes shed tears until they run down copiously on his face for a harm we have suffered at the hands of our enemies, God will ensure for him a place of righteous mansions to dwell therein for countless ages in paradise.) And, any man of faith who may suffer harm for our sake and his eyes shed tears for such harm . . . God would surely take away all pain from his face on the Day of Resurrection and would protect him from His wrath and the fire.⁹

'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, was considered the greatest of weepers, for he mourned his father for forty years. Whenever food was brought before

him, he would remember his father's sufferings and weep until his food became wet with his tears. He would repeat at the same time, 'The son of the Apostle of God [Ḥusayn] was killed hungry, the son of the Apostle of God was killed thirsty.'¹⁰ One day he went out to the wilderness accompanied by his servant; he prostrated himself on the ground and began to sob loudly until his face was bathed with his tears. The servant then protested that if his master would not cease his weeping he would surely perish. But the sorrowful *Imām* replied that Jacob was a prophet and had twelve children; when God temporarily absented one of them, his hair turned white and his eyes became blind. Yet he, the *Imām*, saw with his own eyes his father and seventeen of his cousins killed; so how could he not weep for them.¹¹

Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn provided the powerful example for all weepers here on earth, but after his death his example became but a memory of the past. The actual continuity of sorrow between the Holy Family and their devotees is most powerfully presented in the mother of the martyred *Imām*, Fāṭimah the Radiant. We observed that she remains as the mistress of the House of Sorrows, not only in this world but in the world to come as well. We shall return again at much greater length to her role after her death in the following chapter. Her tears will kindle God's wrath against her son's murderers, evoking His mercy and forgiveness for the *Imām's* community of mourners. Still, however, we are told that she began her long lamentations in paradise immediately after his death, and thus will she continue till the day of his final vindication. All things weep in emulation of her tears, and the tears of the faithful here on earth are but a way of sharing in her sorrows and a means of bringing consolation to her broken heart.

Fāṭimah's incessant weeping and its effect on all creation is dramatically described by the sixth *Imām*. Al-Šādiq declared to Abū Baṣīr, one of his prominent followers, that whenever he looked at the children of Fāṭimah, his eyes would well up with tears for their hard lot in this world. He then wept as he embraced his own son Ismāʿīl, who evoked that memory. The sixth *Imām* continued:

. . . for truly Fāṭimah continues to weep for him [Ḥusayn], sobbing so loudly that hell would utter such a loud cry, which, had its keepers [the angels] not been ready for it, . . . its smoke and fire

would have escaped and burned all that is on the face of the earth. Thus they contain hell as long as Fāṭimah continues to weep . . . for hell would not calm down until her loud weeping had quieted.¹²

The seas would come nigh, bursting into one another, had the angels charged to watch over them not rushed to contain their waves and cool down the burning fire of their sorrow with their wings. The angels, likewise, weep for Fāṭimah's weeping, praising God and invoking his mercy. The *Imām* addressed his disciple, saying, 'O Abū Baṣīr, would you not also wish to console Fāṭimah?' The two wept together for a long time until the man left the *Imām*, his heart heavy with grief.¹³

It was stressed in this study that the House of Sorrows includes not only all of humanity, but all of creation, both the universe and the heavenly realms, this world and the world to come. Further, all things are integrated into the drama of martyrdom and endowed with feelings and personality not very different from human feelings and emotions. Here we see myth attaining its highest expression, where men and inanimate things play an active role in a universal drama which transcends all limitations of time, space and human imagination. The sixth *Imām* asserted that when Ḥusayn was killed, all things, visible and invisible, paradise and hell, and the seven heavens and seven earths with all their inhabitants, wept for him. Specifying even more exactly the manner and duration of this great mourning, he said to another one of his close followers, Zirārah b. A'yun:

O Zirārah, the heavens wept for forty days with blood.¹⁴ The earth wept for forty days as it was covered in black [literally, in mourning]; the sun similarly wept for forty days with eclipses and redness. The mountains were torn asunder and scattered, and the seas burst.¹⁵

The *Imām* then described the terrible sorrow and violence of hell and the continuous weeping of the angels, concluding, ' . . . had it not been for the *hujaj* [proofs or witnesses] of God on earth, the earth would have split open and melted away with all its inhabitants.'¹⁶

As liturgical materials, these traditions all exhibit powerful directness of language and insistent repetition of ideas aimed at evoking deep sorrow in the participants, a psychological and emotional state of

total immersion in the spirit of the *ta'zīyah* celebration. Most of them paint a vivid picture of the tragedy and its effects, first on members of the Holy Family themselves, then on humanity in general, and finally on nature and the entire universe. Any tradition could provide the themes needed to remind the faithful of their own part in the sacred drama and thus provide the basis for a *ta'zīyah majlis*, or memorial service. It may perhaps be of some interest to describe briefly the various themes of one such celebrated tradition.

The tradition we will now consider is a dialogue between the eighth *Imām*, 'Alī al-Riḍā, and one of his disciples, al-Rayyān Ibn Shabīb. The man came to visit the *Imām* on the first day of Muḥarram and the *Imām* asked him if he were fasting. Ibn Shabīb said that he was not, and asked why he should fast on that day in particular. The *Imām* observed that it was the day on which Zechariah begged God, saying 'Lord, give me of Thy goodness a goodly offspring. Yea, Thou hearest prayer.'¹⁷ The *Imām* went on to say that men (that is, the Arabs before Islām) had prohibited fighting during this month, yet Muslims had killed the descendant of their Prophet during it and had taken their women captive. Thus they violated the sanctity of this sacred month.

Having set the tone of sorrow, the *Imām* then addressed his companion: ' . . . O Ibn Shabīb, if you would weep for anything, weep for Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, for he was slain like a lamb, and with him were slain eighteen men of his family the like of whom could not be found on the face of the earth.'¹⁸ The *Imām* related the tragic event and the sorrow it should evoke in every heart to the cosmic expression of grief, declaring that the seven heavens and earths wept for Ḥusayn. He stressed the necessity for human grief; mankind should join that universal chorus of mourners.

The tradition under consideration provides a complete picture not only of *Shī'ī* Muḥarram piety, but *Shī'ī* hopes and bitter disappointments as well. The *Imām* continued, asserting that four thousand angels came down from heaven to lend support to Ḥusayn against his enemy, but they found him dead. They were charged by God to guard his grave and weep for him until the day of the appearance of the *Mahdī*, the avenger of Ḥusayn's blood. ' . . . They shall be among his supporters with their war cry, "O the revenge for the blood of Ḥusayn."¹⁹ Then

the *Imām* returned to the original theme of weeping and informed Ibn Shabīb that he had been told by his father on the authority of his fathers that when Ḥusayn died the heaven rained down blood and red clay. The *Imām* assured his disciple that if he would weep for Ḥusayn and make a pilgrimage to his tomb, God would forgive all his sins no matter how grave and numerous they might be. Finally, stressing the intimate relationship of the *imāms* with their followers in the House of Sorrows, the *Imām* told Ibn Shabīb, ‘. . . If it would please you to have the reward (*thawāb*) of those who were martyred with Ḥusayn, say whenever you remember “Oh how I wish I were with them [that is, the martyrs of Karbalā’] that I may have achieved great victory.”’ To emphasize further this point, the *Imām* counselled his disciple, ‘. . . If you wish to be with us in our high stations in paradise, rejoice for our joy and grieve for our sorrow, and hold fast to our authority (*walāyah*); for even if a man would take a stone as his master (*walī*) God would bring him together with it for reckoning on the Day of Resurrection.’²⁰

It must be clear from our discussion so far in this chapter that sorrow and weeping for the martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn and the suffering of the Holy Family became a source of salvation for those who chose to participate in this unending flow of tears. For human beings, this is a choice which they could make or refuse, thereby choosing salvation or judgment.) The rest of creation, however, is by divine decree the stage, as it were, upon which this drama of martyrdom is forever enacted. By being part of the sacred drama, nature itself becomes sacred. This sacralization of nature may be seen symbolically in the sanctity of the days of Muḥarram, the sacralization of time, and of Karbalā’, the sacralization of space.

It was observed in the previous chapter that *Imām* Ḥusayn and his family encamped in Karbalā’ on the second of Muḥarram; this may be regarded as the beginning of the end of the tragic ordeal. As Ḥusayn was destined to suffer martyrdom in Muḥarram, even before time began (at least calendrical time) so the days of this month, especially the first ten, have always belonged to sacred time. We shall therefore begin the second section of this study by examining a few traditions that deal specifically with the sanctity of ‘*Āshūrā*’.

5.2 THE *Ta'zīyah* CELEBRATION: ITS GROWTH AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The death of Ḥusayn serves as a strong basis for identity and cohesion in the *Shī'ī* community,¹ as well as a basis for the integration of all creation into the community's spiritual history. (Great emphasis is laid on keeping the memory of this tragic event alive by all possible means, in spite of opposition, hardship and persecution.) From the beginning, the impetus was provided by the *imāms* themselves, who promised great rewards for the tears of the devotees. The promise of eternal bliss and security nourished and even encouraged the hopes and aspirations of the community for a better life even in this world. Hence, the concept of *jihād* (holy struggle) gained a deeper and more personal meaning. Whether through weeping, the composition and recitation of poetry, showing compassion and doing good to the poor or carrying arms, the *Shī'ī* Muslim saw himself helping the *Imām* in his struggle against the wrong (*ẓulm*) and gaining for himself the same merit (*thawāb*) of those who actually fought and died for him. The *ta'zīyah*, in its broader sense the sharing of the entire life of the suffering family of Muḥammad, has become for the *Shī'ī* community the true meaning of compassion. Empathy with the *imāms* is expressed through weeping and recitation of elegies and the performance of the entire *ta'zīyah* ritual.)

Through ritual, religious men and women can relive an event in their spiritual history and renew their relationship with it. Through the enactment of an important event of the past, the 'now' of a religious community may be extended back into the past and forward into the future. Thus, history is no longer the mere flow of happenings in time without purpose or direction. Rather, through the present moment, that is, the ritualistic moment, time and space become unified and events move toward a definite goal. In the ritualistic moment, serial time becomes the bridge connecting primordial time and its special history with the timeless eternity of the future. This eternal fulfillment of time becomes the goal of human time and history.)

It may be argued with only partial justification that Islām provides few such moments for the community of the pious, apart from the five

daily prayers, the fast of Ramaḍān, and the pilgrimage ritual of the ḥajj; the *Shi'ī* group of this community has more than made up for whatever deficiency might exist.²¹

The renewal of the relationship of the pious *Shi'ī* Muslims with their *imāms*, who lived in the long ago of the community's history, can be achieved at any moment in time through the *ta'zīyah* ritual, but especially on the day of 'Āshūrā'. Every Muḥarram becomes the month of the tragedy of Karbalā' and every 'Āshūrā' the day of the martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn.

The special significance of the day of 'Āshūrā' arises from the sufferings and martyrdom of the third *Imām*, his family and friends. Very early Islāmic tradition has claimed for that day high status: it was said that on it many supernatural events took place. Such claims were soon countered by the gravity and character that the day of 'Āshūrā' acquired. It is to be observed not as a festive occasion of joy and blessing, but as the day of sorrow and mourning. Indeed, the tenth of Muḥarram should not resemble any other day of festivity; there is no observance of special acts of worship, such as on the days of Ramaḍān. It is a day on which only sad remembrance should be observed.¹

One day, one of the companions of the sixth *Imām* came to see him and found him exceedingly sad, tears running down his cheeks. The *Imām* reminded his friend that his sorrow was for the day of 'Āshūrā', the day of afflictions. The man asked if one should fast on that day, and the *Imām* specifically enjoined his disciple to experience hunger and hardship by not eating or drinking, but not to observe that day as a regular fast. Rather, he counselled his follower to break his fast an hour after the mid-afternoon prayers with a piece of hard bread and a drink of water. 'For it is at that time of day that the tragic ordeal for Ḥusayn and his companions was over as they lay dead on the ground, thirty men of the family of the Prophet and their companions.'²²

Here again we see a definite tension within the tradition. We are sometimes told that the day of 'Āshūrā' was a day on which God performed special acts of creation, or manifested His mercy and forgiveness to the prophets of old. We shall examine a few examples of this kind of tradition presently. In the tradition just cited, the *Imām* declared that, ' . . . God in His wisdom created light on Friday, the first

of Ramaḍān, and darkness on Wednesday, the day of 'Āshūrā'.²³ 'Āshūrā' is a day of darkness and disorder, in the universe, On it, darkness, the symbol of evil and chaos, was created; on it, after the death of Ḥusayn, the laws of nature were suspended as the sun darkened in mid-day, the stars collided with one another, and the heavens were troubled.

According to a very early tradition already referred to,²⁴ the Prophet was told that when Ḥusayn died, '. . . The earth shall be shaken from its foundations, the mountains shall quiver and be disturbed, the seas will rise up in furious waves, and the heavens shall quake with their denizens, all in anger and sorrow for thee O Muḥammad, and for what thy progeny shall suffer after thee. . . .'²⁵ These were not simply portents showing the gravity of the event, as we saw in Chapter 3 above, but a genuine manifestation of the grief and angry vengeance of entire creation. The tradition goes on to assert that all things would then seek permission from God to lend support to the wronged *Imām* and his companions; but God would insist that vengeance is His, and will mete out such terrible torments for these evildoers as not to be compared with the torments of any other people.

The *imāms* strongly insist that the day of 'Āshūrā' should not be taken as a day of joy and festivity; according to some non-*Shī'ī* traditions, it seems that the day was regarded as such.²⁶ There is a *ḥadīth* reported from 'Alī, the first *Imām*, on the authority of Maytham al-Tammār, who told it to a woman, Jabalah al-Makkīyyah. She asked how it should be that people would regard the day of 'Āshūrā' as a day of joy and blessing. Maytham wept and answered:

. . . They shall fabricate a *ḥadīth* [prophetic saying] claiming that it was on that day that God forgave Adam, but in fact, He forgave him during the month of Dhū-l Ḥijjah [i.e., the month of pilgrimage and feast of sacrifice]. They shall assert wrongly that it was the day on which God accepted David's repentance, but that also was in Dhū-l Ḥijjah.²⁷

Then Maytham continued to refute the claims that on the tenth of Muḥarram, Noah's ark rested on dry land, and God split the Red Sea for the children of Israel, assigning different dates to these events.²⁸

The day of 'Āshūrā' according to the eighth *Imām*, must be ob-

served as a day of inactivity, sorrow and total disregard for worldly cares. It may be that the unique character of this day has evolved as a reaction to traditions which sought to assert its sacred and joyous aspects. It may also be that the ancient Jewish ('Āshūrā') observance, characterized by grief, fasting and total inactivity, played a role in the growth of Shi'ī ('Āshūrā') piety. Furthermore, ('Āshūrā') is the only day in the Islamic calendar, to our knowledge, clearly stipulated as a day of total rest. Of course, this injunction has never been taken literally. Rather, the entire period of ('Āshūrā'), the first ten days of Muḥarram, is full of activity but of a special kind.

It must also be remembered that the month of Muḥarram, even in pre-Islāmic times, was regarded as a sacred month. Let us conclude our remarks by quoting at some length the stipulations of the eighth *Imām* concerning the observance of the day of ('Āshūrā'):

He who abandons any cares for his needs on the day of ('Āshūrā'), God would fulfill all his needs in this world and the next. He who takes the day of ('Āshūrā') as the day of his afflictions and grief and weeping, God would make the Day of Resurrection a day of his joy and exaltation, and we shall be a comfort and security for him in paradise. But he who calls that day a day of blessing, and on it stores any provisions in his house, these provisions would not be blessed. He would be moreover consigned along with Yazīd, ('Ubaydallāh Ibn Ziyād and 'Umar Ibn Sa'd to the deepest pit of the fire.²⁹

The manifestation of sorrow and grief by actually weeping for the Holy Family of Muḥammad needs an impetus. We have seen that one strong aid for creating the proper atmosphere of sorrow has been to relate one or more of the many traditions attributed to the *imāms*, enjoining their followers to lament Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the sufferings of other members of his family. By emphasizing one or several aspects of the tragedy of Karbalā', the devotees are reminded of the object of their sorrow. Soon special memorial services (the *ta'zīyah majālis*) developed, giving this religio-political phenomenon a rich ritualistic character.

Tradition insists that the *ta'zīyah majālis*, or commemorative services for the death of Ḥusayn, started immediately after his death. On their way to Kūfah, the women and children of the martyred *Imām*

stopped by the headless bodies, left unburied, and raised the lament for him and his companions. It is reported that before leaving Karbalā', Ibn Sa'd prayed over the dead of his camp and buried them; but he left Ḥusayn and his companions unburied until three days later, when people of the tribe of Asad, living in the neighborhood, buried Ḥusayn where he was and dug a separate mass grave for the rest of his companions near him.³⁰ The last act of cruelty of the Umayyad general, who denied the grandson of the Prophet the last rites of a proper burial, is mentioned in many poems and popular traditions.

In Kūfah, moreover, the men and women of the city met the captives of the Holy Family beating their heads and breasts and weeping in deep remorse for their own treachery. According to the historian al-Ya'qūbī, it was then that the movement of the repenters (*al-tawwābūn*) began.³¹ This movement was to play an important role in the subsequent history of the Muslim community and, more importantly for our purpose, in the development of the *ta'zīyah* tradition through the unswerving devotion of its members to the memory of the son of the Apostle of God and their equally unswerving determination to avenge his blood.

In Damascus, at the house of Yazīd, his own women joined those of Ḥusayn in a lamentation which lasted seven days. The *Via Dolorosa*, along which the *Imām* and his family had walked from Medina to Karbalā', was again traversed back to the holy city by way of Damascus by the Holy Family, this time bereft of its leader. We are told that, on their way back to Medina, the women and children of Ḥusayn requested their kind escort to pass by Karbalā'; there, forty days after the tragic event, they held the first lamentation at his grave.³² In Medina, the people of the city met the captives with lamentations and grief. From that time onward Medina became a house of mourning for the clan of Hāshim and their supporters until al-Mukhtār sent the head of Ibn Ziyād to 'Alī, Ḥusayn's son.

During the Umayyad period, the memory of the death of Ḥusayn was kept in the homes of the *imāms* and other members of the Hāshimite clan. Poets frequented the homes of the *imāms* and led the lamentation (*niyāḥah*) sessions with their verses. The *imāms* provided the liturgical basis for this new manifestation of popular piety in the

traditions already discussed in this study and many others like them. This period was a formative one for *Shī'ī* piety and the growth of its distinctive religious identity. Men like the fourth *Imām*, Zayn al-*Ābidīn*, and his descendants after him expressed their protest against the ruling authorities through their tears and the tears of their followers in private gatherings, where the sufferings and wrongs inflicted on the Holy Family were remembered and grieved. (It was in this early period that the *ta'zīyah* tradition was established; it was only a matter of time before it became a public form of religious piety.³³)

In the early stages of *Ābbāsīd* rule, the *ta'zīyah* celebrations were fostered and encouraged by the new rulers themselves. For political reasons, and probably out of genuine religious feelings, at least for some of the early architects of the *Ābbāsīd* empire, the caliphs of the house of *Ābbās* championed the cause of the *Hāshimītes*. Through this cause they sought to legitimize their own claims to authority. Thus *ta'zīyah* sessions were at first held openly, but when this political weapon began to threaten *Ābbāsīd* claims to authority, rulers such as al-Mutawakkil (847–861 A.D.) did all they could to crush this pietistic movement. Al-Mutawakkil destroyed the tomb of *Ḥusayn* and forbade pilgrimages to the shrine. Yet all his efforts served to strengthen the *ta'zīyah* tradition rather than to crush it.³⁴

As *Shī'ism* spread and *Shī'ī* rulers, or rulers with strong *Shī'ī* sympathies, arose, the *ta'zīyah* celebrations gained popularity. In Iraq, the *Buwayhīds* gave the *ta'zīyah* celebrations their encouragement and patronage. Thus we read that in 352/963 on the day of *Āshūrā*, the *Buwayhīd* ruler Mu'izz al-Dawlah closed the markets of Baghdad and draped them in black sackcloth. *Shī'ī* men and women paraded the streets in solemn processions, mourning the martyred *Imām Ḥusayn*.³⁵ Similar practices and customs appeared in Syria in the *Ḥamdānīd* court, in Egypt during *Fāṭimīd* rule, and later in Iran with the rise of the *Safavīd* dynasty.

In the first and second centuries of the *hijrah*, lamentation sessions (*majālis al-niyāḥah*) were held in the houses of the people of the Holy Family, and much later in the shrines of the *imāms*. With the third century, we witness the appearance of the professional mourner (*nā'iḥ*) who chanted elegies, related stories of the sufferings of the *imāms*, and in time read one of the martyrdom narratives (*maqātil*) which were

written specifically for that purpose. Such professional leaders of the *ta'zīyah majālis* were also known as *qurrā' al-Ḥusayn* (readers for Ḥuṣayn).³⁶ These leaders contributed much to the growth of *Shī'ī* popular piety, especially to the crystallization of the Muḥarram cultus. It is related that one day, as the mosque of Baghdad was crowded with people celebrating a *ta'zīyah majlis*, a man came and asked for a well-known *nā'ih*. The old man declared that he had seen Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' in a dream; she had ordered him to seek that particular *nā'ih* and convey her command to him to mourn her son with the poem of 'Alī al-Nāshī'. Hearing this, men beat their breasts and faces in excitement and offered the messenger of the holy woman all kinds of hospitality. He refused, saying 'God forbid that I, the slave of my mistress al-Zahrā', accept wages for her service.'³⁷ Since such professional mourners are still present, fresh tales, expressing the pleasure of members of the Holy Family with those who show their utmost dedication to their memory, continue to be told. Hence, the old relationship of the *imāms* and their followers is never broken, rather it is often renewed by fresh dynamic contacts between the *imāms* and their devotees.

'By the end of the third century in Baghdad, Aleppo and Cairo, there were special houses for the *ta'zīyah* celebrations known as *Ḥusaynīyyāt*. To this day, these large halls are constructed as annexes to mosques; frequently they are gathering places for all kinds of official and unofficial religious ceremonies and occasions.) Primarily, however, these halls are houses of sorrow where people gather to share in the tragic lives of the *imāms*. The *Ḥusaynīyyah* of a town or village has come to serve as the starting point of the 'Āshūrā' procession. For over eleven centuries, devotees have formed into large processions on special occasions. They go through the streets of the town chanting dirges for the *Imām* and his family, and finally return to the *Ḥusaynīyyah* for the actual celebration of a *ta'zīyah majlis*. In many places where the seclusion of women is still strictly observed, men go out during the day and women at night, barefoot and bareheaded, lamenting the dead of Karbalā' as they beat their breasts and heads. Even to the present time, as the author witnessed in Iran recently, in spite of the disapproval of both the civil and religious authorities, women and men beat themselves with chains inflicting wounds on

their heads with large sharp knives to display their grief and share the actual physical pains of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Quite early in the development of the Muḥarram cultus, people felt the need for some concrete symbol or representation of the events of Karbalā'. First a horse appeared in the middle of the procession, covered with a shroud and smeared with blood; this represented the horse of Ḥusayn after the *Imām*'s death.³⁸ By the tenth Islāmic century (fifteenth century A.D.), this procession began to evolve into the familiar passion play, or what may be more accurately termed the representation (*shabīh*) of the entire battle of Karbalā', with people playing the various roles of its major characters.³⁹ We need not here enter into any detailed discussion of this interesting phenomenon in *Shī'ī* Islām, as it has received attention from many scholars for the last three centuries. It is important to emphasize, however, once more that the *ta'zīyah* celebration has assumed many forms, reflecting the diverse cultures in which it is commonly held. As the author grew up in a *Shī'ī* milieu, it may be of some interest to describe a few such celebrations in which he took part.

Although the death of Ḥusayn and his family and friends is usually commemorated during the first ten days of Muḥarram of every year, *ta'zīyah majālis* may be sponsored by people at any time in fulfillment of a vow, in gratitude to God for a successful undertaking, in dedication of a new house, or simply out of the desire of a pious person to have a *ta'zīyah majlis* held at his home. The months of Ramaḍān, the rest of Muḥarram and up to the 20th of Ṣafar are especially favored for holding such memorial sessions. A *majlis* held in fulfillment of a vow or as the desire of an individual is usually brief, lasting not more than half an hour. It consists of reading an episode of the journey of Ḥusayn, or the life of the Holy Family in general, and perhaps some exhortations by the reader.

During the (*Āshūrā*) period, the *ta'zīyah majālis* are held in the afternoons in the homes of prominent people of the village or community, and in the evening in the *Ḥusaynīyyah* or some other public place. Every evening the community joins the *Imām* on his journey from Medina to Iraq, step by step. The *majlis* begins with a short reading from the Qur'ān, then the reader chants or reads a long passage or poem describing some of the episodes of that particular day of the

journey, and tries to emphasize some hardship encountered on the way by the *Imām* or someone of his family. Finally, the reader himself, or another orator, gives a long sermon on the sufferings of earlier prophets or the persecutions suffered by members of the Holy Family before and after Ḥusayn.

The *majlis* is often followed by a procession through the streets of the town. Such processions give the town or village folk poet an opportunity to extemporize a dirge for the people to chant as they parade the streets. They also give the young men of the community an opportunity to show their devotion, employing all their strength to beat their bare chests. Late one summer, the author was amazed by the fervor of a young man who had just returned from a sanatorium after a critical lung operation. His loud cries of *allāhu akbar* and hard chest beating could have hardly been endured by a healthy person, let alone one in his condition. Finally, the *ta'zīyah majālis* provide an opportunity for people to show their generosity in sharing their wealth and even basic provisions with others, as they distribute food and beverages of various kinds to the participants. In large towns or cities, as was the case in Mashhad, the *ta'zīyah majālis* are sponsored by guilds: bakers, textile, or carpet merchants and the like. The elaborateness and generosity of food distribution, as well as the rank and number of the *ta'zīyah* leaders in a *majlis*, depend on the means of the individual or group sponsoring it.

The day of (*Āshūrā*) itself is the culmination of the enactment of the tragedy in all its details. The day begins right after the dawn prayers with a reading of the *maqṭal*, or *maṣra'*, as it is called in Lebanon, the actual martyrdom narrative of Ḥusayn, the male members of his family and friends. The reading is often interrupted by loud prayers and salutations of peace on Muḥammad and his family, and an occasional round of sweets, dates or beverages distributed by a member of the community in the hope of a heavenly reward for his good deed. It is especially meritorious to relieve the thirst and hunger of the faithful on such an occasion, as a sort of substitute for the fervent wish to have done the same for the martyrs of Karbalā'. Around mid-morning, as the reading ends, people are again led for a while by a folk poet specially gifted in dirges (*nadb*) for the *Imām*, his children, brothers and cousins. The day ends, sometimes with a staged enactment of the

events of the martyrdom in a large open air area outside the town, or with a long *zīyārah* of (Āshūrā). The observance ends around mid-afternoon, when the entire congregation is invited to the homes of the pious and well-to-do for a special meal. The food consists of one dish, wheat cooked in a broth of lamb or beef shanks, an elaborate dish that the women usually spend many hours preparing.

As every activity of the (Āshūrā) period must be in some way related to the Holy Family and, more specifically, to the event of Karbalā, the pious find much edification and symbolism even in this holy repast. A woman once related that as she and other women of the house were busy preparing the (Āshūrā) *harisah*, as this dish is called, a venerable old woman came to help, She was invited to stay and share the food, but she declined, saying, 'Would I eat food prepared for the soul of my brother Ḥusayn?' The woman, of course, was Zaynab, the sorrowful sister of the martyred *Imām*.

For some people, even these shanks of animals and large chunks of meat used in the (Āshūrā) food have their symbolic significance. (Alī al-Akbar was supposed to have been cut into pieces by the swords of the enemies. Thus the pieces of meat serve as a reminder of his cruel death. Such dramatic and often gory symbolism is quite common in popular *Shī'ī* Muḥarram folklore. It may be of some interest, therefore, to conclude these remarks on the ta'zīyah celebrations with a few words about one such dramatic tale.

Ḥusayn, according to folk tradition, had a young daughter three or four years old called Ruqayyah. When the captives were brought to Yazīd, she wept incessantly, asking for her father. One night she dreamed of him and woke up utterly distraught with grief for his absence. Yazīd ordered that her father's head be brought to her so she might look at it and be consoled. The young girl took the head to her bosom and cried out with bitter tears:

O father, who did bathe you in your blood! O father who did sever your jugular vein! O father, who made me an orphan when I am still a child! Who is left for us after you; who shall succor a young orphan girl until she grows up. O father, who shall care for the widows after you. . . .Lost without you are these tearful eyes of the women. Terrible without you, O father, is our despair and captivity. Would

that I could have been a ransom for you. Would that I was blind and could not see your grey head stained with your blood.⁴⁰

The girl then pressed her lips to the dead mouth and died. This story may be taken as a good representative of the highly popular literature of the Muḥarram piety. Such folklore tales often provide the themes of popular elegies (*marāthī*), especially those put in the mouth of one or another of the women of the Holy Family. Poetry has played an important role both in the inception and growth of the Muḥarram cultus; we shall therefore now turn to the consideration of this important genre of the *ta'zīyah* literature.

5.3 THE PLACE OF LAMENTATION POETRY (*Marāthī*) IN THE MUḤARRAM CULTUS

One of the most important elements in the development of the *ta'zīyah* ritual has been, and still is, poetry. In verse, the poet could express religious, cultural and social ideas and sentiments, not only of his heart and mind, but also of the collective soul of the people, so to speak. The poet, in a way, portrays his culture and speaks for his people. Before we analyze a few of the poetic themes and relate them to the hagiographical developments with which we have been concerned in this study, a word may be in order concerning the actual emphasis placed on the composition and recitation of lamentation poems, of what we may call dirges or elegies (*marāthī*) by the *imāms* themselves.

The purpose of writing and reciting such poetry is not simply to display artistic talent, but more importantly to induce sorrow and weeping. Yet a poem that does not describe in tender and highly artistic language some aspect or episode of the tragedy would not have fulfilled its purpose. This gives the *marāthī* genre of poetry a unique character. It is perhaps the most dramatic and epic-like poetry, at least in Arabic.

It may be safely inferred from many reports that the *imāms*, especially the sixth *Imām*, used to gather their followers together to remember the death of Ḥusayn. Poets were often asked to recite their verses of lamentation and grief for the gatherings. Two closely

analogous traditions are most often cited by *Shīrī* scholars, both early and modern ones. One day, the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Šādiq, asked one of his followers, Abū 'Imārah al-Munshid (the chanter or reciter), to recite some verses about Ḥusayn. The man began to recite his verses, and the *Imām* and his family began to weep until the wailings of the women could be heard in the street. The verses our chanter recited were not of his own composition; they will be discussed later. The *Imām* then announced to Abū 'Imārah the great reward he would have in the world to come and continued:

. . . He who recites poetry about Ḥusayn, causing fifty persons to weep and weeps himself, will have a place in paradise.

Then the *Imām* continued to repeat the same statement, each time reducing the number of people caused to weep: first to thirty, twenty, ten, then even to one. He concluded, '. . . Even if one recites poetry about Ḥusayn and weeps himself alone, or even pretends to weep, his will be paradise on the Day of Resurrection.'⁴¹

Two important factors have always given poetry a special place in the *ta'zīyah* ritual: the Arabic poetic genius and the place poetry has enjoyed in Arabic culture, both before and after Islām; and, equally important, the high reward promised the poet on the Day of Judgment. We shall now turn to a brief discussion of some of the major themes and techniques of the *marāthī* poetry. As the literature is truly vast, we shall have to choose only a few examples, following a loose chronology for the early centuries.⁴²

The hagiographical traditions and pietistic religious ideas so far discussed in this study are powerfully and dramatically expressed in very early poems. We have chosen somewhat arbitrarily a few themes to serve as a structural basis for this brief discussion. Our first major theme will be the assertion, in different forms and contexts, that the killing of Ḥusayn was a great sin committed by his murderers, as grievous as the annulment of the sacred precepts of the religion or the killing of a prophet. The second theme will deal with the piety and generosity of the murdered *Imām*, and the nobility, beauty and suffering of the women captives. Rarely is Ḥusayn portrayed as the great warrior we saw in Chapter 4. The poetry we are considering is meant to evoke sorrow, not the spirit of heroism, in the mind of the faithful.

Our third theme will be the participation of all things in creation in the sorrows and sufferings of the *Imām* and his family, and the linking of this tragedy to the prophets of old. This theme is quite a familiar one, as our discussion in Chapter 1 demonstrated. The idea, however, of linking the ancient prophets to the death of Ḥusayn appears somewhat late in poetry. More recent literature asserts that it was for the sake of the *imāms* that the prophets enjoyed divine favor.

Fourthly we shall discuss a poetical technique which is especially popular. This is the dramatization of a specific aspect or episode of the Muḥarram tragedy where the speaker is one of the Holy Family, either the prophet, his daughter Fāṭimah, or one of the women who was present at the battle. This dialogue between the Prophet and one of the women of the Holy Family usually presents the complaint of the family of Ḥusayn for the wrong they have suffered. Occasionally, the person addressed is Fāṭimah, the mother of the *Imām*; her pathetic reaction is vividly portrayed. This poetic device provides a powerful instrument for the *ta'zīyah* leader to create the proper emotional atmosphere for the actual *ta'zīyah majlis*. This will be a suitable point of transition to the last section of this discussion; that is, a consideration of a few dirges which are specifically meant to be chanted in the *ta'zīyah majlis*.

The period following the death of Ḥusayn was a stormy one in Islāmic history. Poets did not generally dare to compose poetry in his memory; when they did, it was kept secret out of fear of the Umayyad authorities.⁴³ The first poet, according to some reports, to compose an elegy (*marthīyah*) on Ḥusayn was 'Iqbah b. 'Amr al-Sahmī.⁴⁴ In al-Sahmī's *marthīyah*, we see a kind of warm and simple piety and grief for the death of the *Imām* and those martyred with him. It is an expression of devotion and reverence, free from the hagiographical and political allusions characteristic of many other poems, especially those belonging to later centuries. The poet, we are told, visited Karbalā' either soon after the death of Ḥusayn or later towards the end of the century.⁴⁵ There he stopped at the tomb of the *Imām* and recited his verses. His poem seems to have been composed in Karbalā', perhaps extemporized as a sudden expression of deep emotion.

I passed the grave of Ḥusayn in Karbalā', and on it my tears flowed copiously.

I continued to weep and grieve for his suffering, and my eye was well assisted by tears and sobs. And with him I mourned a group of men whose graves surround his own.

May the light of an eye, seeking consolation in life when you [Ḥusayn and his followers] were frightened in this world, be darkened.

Peace be upon the dwellers of these graves in Karbalā' . . . May peace be upon them with the setting of the sun and its rising: Peace carried from me by the winds as they blow to and fro.

Men in troops continue to flock in pilgrimage to his grave, where on them flows its musk and sweet fragrance.⁴⁶

The last verse of this short poem may indicate a later development in the reference it makes to the pilgrims. It may be, on the other hand, simply an expression of praise for the *Imām* in drawing large groups of people to his grave.

It was argued in Chapter 4 that the death of Ḥusayn has been regarded as a source of inspiration as well as a definite offense against the religion of Islām; these ideas are as old as the tragedy itself. Ḥusayn, as we have seen, reproached his opponents for the unlawful and irreligious act of seeking to kill the son of the Prophet's daughter. This charge of unforgivable crime against the *Imām*'s murderers, as well as the fact that his death was as grievous as the death or violation of all religious principles, has provided the theme for much poetic literature since the time of the tragic event itself.

It is reported that a man of the second generation after the companions of the Prophet,⁴⁷ the followers (*al-tābi'ūn*) as they are called, disappeared for a month after seeing the head of Ḥusayn nailed to the gate of Yazīd's palace in Damascus. When he reappeared, his friends asked the reason for his long absence. He said, 'Do you not see what has befallen us?' Then he recited the following verses:

They came with your head O son of Muḥammad's daughter thoroughly bathed in its blood.

Thirsty did they kill you, no regard to revelation (*tanzīl*) or exegesis (*ta'wīl*) did they show in your death.

It is as though, through you O son of the daughter of Muḥammad,
they purposely killed an apostle.

They cried as they killed you 'God is most great', yet in killing you
they truly killed the cries of *takbīr* and *tahlīl*.⁴⁸

This sense of shame, humiliation and remorse has found expression in almost all poems written in praise of the Holy Family, or in commemoration of their sufferings. The sanctity of Islām and its Prophet were thought to have been violated by men who professed faith in the religion of Islām and the apostleship of its Prophet. It was equally felt by men who were themselves the perpetrators of the shameful act, and by those who did nothing to prevent it. Such feelings often express themselves in violent outbreaks of revolt and other political activities. Also, inevitably, men motivated by the love of power and political gain took full advantage of these feelings. It is, for instance, an historical fact that the 'Abbāsīd dynasty rose to power on the basis of their kinship with the Holy Family and through the loyalty of *Shī'ī* Muslims. We can observe a fluctuation in the development of the Muḥarrām commemoration between free and powerful expression of the pietistic emotions and imagination of the faithful, and the quiet and often muffled tearful voices of the poets and the rest of the community. This fluctuation, however, was never widespread or lasting. It was therefore never a hindrance to the growth of the rich poetic literature which continues to develop down to our own time.

A poet, Ja'far Ibn 'Affān al-Ṭā'ī, who died about two decades after the establishment of 'Abbāsīd rule (d. ca. 153/770) could still be clear in his condemnation of the Umayyad culprits and their accomplices. He, like many other poets of the first two centuries of Islāmic history, belonged to the circle of the *imāms* and first recited poetry to them. Al-Ṭā'ī recited his verses to the sixth *Imām* in one of the *ta'zīyah* commemoration sessions.

He began his poem with the declaration, 'Let him who wishes to weep, weep for Islām for its principles (*aḥkām*) were violated and abandoned.' Then the poem describes the death of Ḥusayn and his having been left a prey for birds and beasts on the sands of Karbalā'. Men did not lend him support because they lost their senses and went astray. The poet continues:

They rather extinguished their light with their own hands, may those hands be paralyzed. For Ḥusayn called upon them for help in his struggle in the name of Muḥammad as his son, Ḥusayn, was as dear to him as his own soul. Nor did they respect his kinship to the Apostle, and their feet stumbled and went astray. May the Merciful not bless the community of his grandfather, even though they may perform prayers and fasts to God. . . .⁴⁹

Another poet who lived about a century later, al-Sirrī,⁵⁰ expressed in a few powerful verses most of the sentiments connected with the death of *Imām* Ḥusayn. The poet begins with a sort of prayer that the tomb containing the corpse of the thirsty *Imām* be shaded with aromatic plants (*rayḥān*). He then continues to describe the feelings of the devotees at the mention or remembrance of the *Imām*:

It is as though our hearts at his remembrance are placed on burning coals, or are pierced with sharp knives.

The poet then reiterates the idea that the death of Ḥusayn was like the destruction of religion:

Forsooth they did not efface the traces of his father, rather in killing him they destroyed the foundations of religion.⁵¹

The last verse alludes to the political idea that by killing Ḥusayn, his enemies sought to destroy the spiritual and political ideals which 'Alī embodied for the *Shī'ī* community, and which provided its *raison d'être*.

The theme we have been considering in the last few paragraphs may be regarded as a very important one in the tragedy of Karbalā'. For while in recent times many Muslim thinkers, and even *Shī'ī* ones, have consciously attempted to purge the Muḥarram cultus of many of its mythical and supernatural accretions, they continue to see the death of Ḥusayn as the most important, powerful protest in Islāmic history against all wrong, religious as well as political.

As previously observed, Ḥusayn was seldom portrayed as a hero, especially in poetry and other types of *ta'zīyah* literature. His sufferings, abandonment and, finally, ruthless murder are themes better suited to heighten the emotions of the participants and draw out their

tears. His beauty and nobility, as well as that of his womenfolk, besides adding a romantic element to the otherwise sordid picture, have served to stir the emotions of the devotees. Ḥusayn whose luminous countenance even in his last moments of life dazzled those who saw him,⁵² was soiled with blood and sand and left to be discolored by the burning sun. Likewise, his sisters and daughters who had been hidden from the eyes of men, and whose beauty struck those who saw them as they were carried off as captives, were unveiled and exposed for all to see, mounted on camels without cover or protection.⁵³

Al-Sirrī expressed these ideas with great clarity and artistic excellence. In his verses, we see the skillful use of imagery against the usual effective background of tragedy and suffering. Here are a few verses from the beginning of a long poem:

Shall I forget at the banks of the Euphrates (*al-Ṭaff*) Ḥusayn lying slain on the ground, and around him the pure ones [that is, other male members of his family] like the resplendent stars.

Shall I forget Ḥusayn on the day when his head was carried away, radiant as the full moon (*badr*) on a full moon night.

Shall I forget the women captives, how, after the seclusion of soft chambers, were exposed.⁵⁴

This theme of the nobility and magnanimity of *Imām* Ḥusayn is expressed with a deep feeling of love and bereavement, the intimacy of a loving and distraught wife, in the few verses attributed to his wife, al-Rabāb, of the tribe of Kalb. Ḥusayn was especially fond of her and her young daughter, Sukaynah; he admitted his love in a few warm and delicate verses.⁵⁵ We are told⁵⁶ that, after his death, she never slept under a roof, but spent the last year of her life wandering in the wilderness and mourning her martyred husband. In the following short poem, she recalls Ḥusayn as a loving husband, a refuge for the poor and destitute and a provider for his children:

Behold him who was a light shining in the darkness, is now in Karbalā' slain and unburied . . .

You were for me a fast mountain to lean upon, and you were a true friend in kinship (*raḥim*) and faith (*dīn*).

Who is left for the orphans and the needy after him who used to provide for the destitute, and to whom every poor person would run for refuge. . . .⁵⁷

Among the most important poets who dedicated their talents to the praise and elegizing of the Holy Family was Ismā'īl Ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥimyarī, who lived in Baghdad between 205/820 and 273/886, or 278/891. Al-Ḥimyarī was himself a *sayyid*, a descendant of the Prophet's family. He is significant not only for his lineage but also for his poetry, which was not only of high artistic calibre, but also typified the religious as well as the political mood of his time.

His famous *qaṣīdah*, already referred to in this chapter,⁵⁸ opens in the usual old Arabic style by addressing a visitor to the tomb of the beloved, thus presenting a concrete picture of the lover or devotee remembering his beloved on the spot of his death. The poet recalls how the sacred bones of *Imām* Ḥusayn, the main subject of the poem, were trampled by the hooves of strong horses. He declares that, after this grave event, life could never again be pleasant. Alluding to the excellence of the *Imām* and his family, their being most worthy of temporal and spiritual leadership, he says:

Behold a grave containing a man whose ancestors are the pure ones,
the best of all men.

His fathers were the people of leadership, the true successors of the
Prophet and his vicegerents.

They were men of great virtue, men of refined character and pleasant
temperament.

The poet then turns to the hypothetical visitor of the sacred shrine and says:

And when you pass by his grave let the halt of your mount be long.
Weep there for the pure one, the son of the pure man [*Alī*] and pure
and unblemished woman [*Fāṭimah*].

Weep like a wailing woman whose man is suddenly snatched by
death.⁵⁹

The poet ends by again returning to the political aspects of the conflict between the *Imām* and his antagonists. He charges his hypothetical

pilgrim to curse Ibn Sa'd and others of the *Imām*'s enemies, naming the chief ones. He emphasizes Ḥusayn's courage and great virtue, contrasting them with the greed, cowardliness and treachery of his opponents. As the purpose of all such elegiac poetry is to bring forth the tears and sighs of the faithful, al-Ḥimyarī ends his poem with these two powerful verses:

O my eye, weep therefore as long as you live for those who always honored their word and kept their covenant.

What excuse have you to cease shedding tears of blood, when of that you are most worthy.⁶⁰

We have seen often in this study how the afflictions of the 'people of the cloak' (*ahl al-kisā'*) were reflected in nature, in the stars and inhabitants of heaven, and even in hell and paradise. The prophets and holy men of old shared in the grief and suffering of the Holy Family; for their sakes, they were blessed and honored by God. All these ideas, with many variations, are expressed in poetry. In fact, this theme of the participation of all things in the great tragedy of Ḥusayn and his family appears in some of the earliest poems, continuing for many centuries as one of the richest themes not solely limited to *Shī'ī* poetry.

Al-Shāfi'ī (Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, d. 204/819), one of the most important Sunnī jurists and founder of the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), left us a very good example of this type of elegiac poetry. He begins his poem on the usual note of sorrow and tears for the sufferings of the *ahl al-bayt*. Then, referring to the martyred *Imām*, he describes 'a man slain for no wrong he had committed, whose shirt is dyed as though in crimson'. The poet goes on to depict the event of Karbalā' in vivid imagery. 'There was much wielding of the sword and great clatter of the spears, and of the horses there was much sobbing after sorrowful neighing.' The theme then shifts to the portents manifesting the participation of nature in the universal grief:

The world quaked for the sake of the family of Muḥammad, and the hard mountains almost melted.

Brilliant stars darkened and others quivered as many veils were violated and many garments rent.

This refers to the violation of the sanctity of the women captives, their own sorrows and rending of garments. Al-Shāfi'ī then asks in aston-

ishment how men could pronounce prayers and salutations on the Apostle of the clan of Hāshim and yet attack his descendants. He concludes by asserting:

. . . if my sin is my love for the family of Muḥammad then this is a sin of which I shall never repent. For they are my intercessors on the day of my standing before God for the final reckoning, the day on which men shall behold great and fearful things.⁶¹

The theme we are considering was articulated by one of the earliest poets in what may be the first or second elegy to come down to us. The poet is Sulaymān Ibn Qattah, who died in Damascus around 126/743.⁶² From the reference the poet makes to specific tribal relations and feuds, it may be inferred that his *marthīyah* is very old. Like many other poets, he sets the background with an actual visit to Karbalā', then goes on to describe the sorrow this visit evoked in him. In the second verse, the poet declares in the form of a rhetorical question:

. . . do you not see how the sun became sick for the death of Ḥusayn and all lands were disturbed.

For they [the Holy Family] have become a grave loss for us after being a great hope . . .

The poet then reproaches the tribe of Qays for their treachery and promises revenge. Shimr, the infamous antagonist of Ḥusayn, was a member of that tribe; therefore, to some extent, the whole tribe must share in his guilt. Ibn Qattah finally returns to the theme of the grief of the cosmos: 'Behold the heavens took to weeping for his death, and our stars mourned him and prayed for him.'⁶³

The last two poems, although quite early, show a fair degree of development. Whether such poems, written at the beginning of the *ta'zīyah* development, must be regarded as simply exaggerations intended to dramatize the tragic event, or whether they actually echo ideas already current in the community, we cannot determine with absolute certainty. However, we can discern the rapid growth of the idea of the cosmic significance of Ḥusayn's death in poetry no less than in prose. A poet who died around the middle of the fourth century of the *hijrah* (mid-tenth century) could already end one of his long and

dramatic elegies with the reproach, ‘. . . O you sons of treachery, whom did you kill?! By my life you killed him through whom all existence subsists.’⁶⁴

We have seen that the prophets of old were told of the sorrows and sufferings of the Holy Family, and directly shared in them. We saw further, in Chapter 2, that Adam’s sin of disobedience was forgiven for the sake of the *imāms*; their names were the secret knowledge revealed to him and the cause of his forgiveness. An unnamed poet who must have lived around the 11th/17th century carries this idea to its ultimate conclusion.⁶⁵ He proclaims that the *imāms* are the light of God and the secret meaning of many of the *sūrah*s of the Qur’ān. Their names were inscribed from eternity on the throne of God. So far the poet simply reiterates some of the ideas we have already encountered in the second chapter of this study. Then he goes further:

. . . had it not been for their sakes, Adam would not have been created nor would any other man have come into being. The earth would not have been spread, or the heavens lifted up, nor would have the sun risen or the full moon appeared. In their names, Noah invoked God’s help in the ark, and thus was saved from the waters of the flood.

Nor, if it were not for them would the fire of the friend (*khalīl*) [Abraham] have turned into coolness and peace,⁶⁶ neither would those great coals have become extinguished.

If it were not for them, Jacob’s sorrow would have never ended, nor Job’s afflictions have been taken away from him.

The poem goes on to list all other major prophets, and to show that their miracles were granted for the sake of the *imāms*. The *imāms* were the secret power in the staff of Moses; for their sake, the sea was parted. For their sake, David’s repentance was accepted, and Jesus was able to raise the dead.⁶⁷ The last verse declares, in fact, that the secret of every prophet before them was part of, or due to, their secret. The special favor granted to each of the major biblical prophets was so granted because of the *imāms*; whatever esoteric powers the prophets possessed were derived from the *imāms*’ esoteric power. Not only prophetic power depended on their being, but the entire creation revolved around them. These are not new ideas, but received new

power and intensity through poetic expression; poetry had to serve the same function and purpose for Muslims that the icon and other pictorial representations did in Christian piety.

One unnamed poet painted such an effective picture that his verses are chanted in many *majālis* of the ('*Āshūrā*') celebration.⁶⁸ The poet begins by declaring his great sorrow for the martyrs of Karbalā': 'I have wept for the killing of the family of Muḥammad, on the banks of the Euphrates (*al-Ṭaff*) until every member of my body shed tears.' Then the poet begins by painting his picture of their plight:

. . . and the womenfolk of Muḥammad were among the enemies, pillaged and their goods divided amongst low and dissolute men. They were pushed around like slave girls, mistreated and beaten with whips . . . as though they were war captives or even more lowly.

Their head covers and veils were forcibly torn off their heads and faces.

Behold a man, his limbs tied in stalks with no one to set him free, and a noble woman taken captive and her earrings snatched away.

He finally turns to the martyred *Imām*:

By God, I cannot forget Ḥusayn dismembered under the hooves of the horses.

Stripped of his clothes, clad only in a garment of crimson, and yet on the morrow he was to wear garments of paradise.

The picture here painted includes all of nature. ' . . . the sun wailed as would a bereaved mother, with hair disheveled,⁶⁹ and time (*dahr*) rent its garments and masked its face.'⁷⁰

One interesting element which we often see in poetry is the exaggeration of actual facts, such as the treatment of captives by their captors. Our early sources say the captives were robbed of their jewelry and other such finery, but there is no mention of any kind of violence being inflicted on them. Yet later poets, wishing to draw a sharp contrast between the sufferings of the Holy Family and the cruelty of their captors, assert that the women were driven before their captives with whips. This is yet another means by which the poets could stir the feelings of pity and sorrow in their hearers.

The *marāthī* genre of poetry often employed dramatic dialogue. Such dialogues would be introduced by or interspersed with pathetic pictures of the suffering of Ḥusayn and his family. Another interesting characteristic of this type of poetry is the use of a story-telling technique in describing the events of Karbalā' and the situation of one or more persons as they were killed or frightened by the ruthless mobs of Ibn Sa'd's army. Sometimes this technique is used with great intricacy and dramatic skill. Often a poet starts a dialogue between himself and the Prophet, and then, when relating a different episode of the tragedy, puts the words in the mouth of one of the women who witnessed the episode.

One of the most famous early poets, Di'bil Ibn 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī,⁷¹ excelled in the use of this technique. In fact, his poetry covers all the themes we have been considering and many others in a great variety of poetic expression. In his famous '*Tā'iyyah*', Di'bil relates the story of Karbalā', mentioning or alluding to most of the traditions connected with it. Towards the end of his poem he addresses Fāṭimah, the mother of the martyred *Imām*:

O Fāṭimah, if you could only imagine Ḥusayn slain, killed thirsty on the bank of the Euphrates; you would then beat your cheeks, O Fāṭimah, over him and let your tears flow copiously down your face.

O Fāṭimah, rise up, O daughter of goodness, and raise the dirge for [men] like heavenly stars lying dead in the wilderness . . .

The poet then goes on to enumerate the graves of the *imāms* and their descendants, naming the lands of their dispersion. Finally, he reiterates the fervent hope of every *Shī'ī* Muslim of witnessing the return of the twelfth *Imām*, the *Mahdī*: '. . . until the day of gathering (*ḥashr*) when God shall send the *qā'im* (*Mahdī*) to relieve us of all sorrows and afflictions. . . .'⁷²

In another poem, Di'bil relates the martyrdom (*maqtal*) of Ḥusayn, employing the dialogue form at several points. He begins in a way familiar in classical Arabic poetry, where a hypothetical person standing at the ruins of the beloved is addressed:

O you who are standing mourning the ruins and chanting, by God, you have gone astray and your guide has left you.

Why do you claim much sorrow when you seek comfort? If you truly are sorrowful, how is it that you can sleep?⁷³

The poet goes on to provide the guidance his hypothetical friend has lost; he enjoins him to weep for Ḥusayn and his family instead, just as Muḥammad and the angels of heaven wept for them. The religion of Islām was torn asunder at his death, and since that day, all Islām continues to mourn him.

After this long introduction, the poet turns to recount the *maq̄tal* with the sister of Ḥusayn, Zaynab, as narrator. He introduces her thus:

How can there be rest when Zaynab, among the women captives, fervently cried out, 'O Aḥmad, behold Ḥusayn cut to pieces with swords, a martyr bathed in his blood.

Naked, without a shroud or garment was he, his bones broken by the hooves of the horses.

And your sons, the virtuous ones, lying slain around him like sacrificial victims, with no one to give them burial.'

Having painted this picture of blood and death, the poet goes on to show the reaction of the cosmos to the grave event. The moon and stars at Ḥusayn's death gathered together in mourning. They wept because they saw Ḥusayn killed by many enemies with few to defend him. The sorrowful sister of the *Imām* continues to tell the Prophet how she and the other women were carried captives, humiliated and their sanctity violated. She then describes the orphans: '. . . around me are the orphans of my brother, robbed of their clothes and humiliated'. After complaining of their thirst, while dogs could drink safely from the waters of the Euphrates, she returns to describe the manner in which Ḥusayn was killed:

. . . O grandfather, behold Shimr treacherously wishing to slay Ḥusayn, O what eye can control its tears. When he [Shimr] was about to let the sword fall upon him, he [Ḥusayn] called out in a low voice 'O Thou who art the only One (*awḥad*), Thou are witness over them and Thou seest their wrongdoing.'⁷⁴

Di'bil's poems on the tragedy of Muḥarram present a complete picture of that tragedy and the grief of the entire universe. Yet he, unlike many

other poets, retains a continuity of presentation which gives his poetry epic character.

Another poet who displayed similar talent and sensitivity was Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣanawbarī, a famous poet who died in Aleppo in 334/945. He emphasized Ḥusayn's noble death more than his valor as a fighter. In fact, al-Ṣanawbarī draws a sharp contrast between Ḥusayn standing firm like a lion in the face of death and Ḥusayn lying on the ground muttering pathetic cries for help with no one to come to his aid:

. . . who shall come to the aid of one whose horse was wounded and whose tents were pulled down.

Who is for the dismembered corpse left naked and abandoned under the sky.

Who is for the one who was embalmed with sand and washed with his blood . . .⁷⁵

While al-Ṣanawbarī employs dramatic techniques to portray the tragedy and draw his hearers into its spirit, he remains somewhat restrained and sober. It is interesting to compare the way a contemporary of his, al-Ṣaqr al-Mušīlī (d. 305/914), expresses similar ideas. The poet addresses the Prophet, relating to him what his descendants suffered after his death. He describes how Ḥasan vomited up his liver because of the poison he was treacherously given to drink. Then he describes how the thirsty Ḥusayn was killed in Karbalā' and his family taken captive as though they were not the family of the Prophet. Al-Mušīlī, wishing to show how Ḥusayn suffered and was wrongly beheaded, then loses his sense of sequence. He writes, ' . . . a body without a head lying on the ground, stretching once a limb and then contracting another in great fear'.⁷⁶ The poet, it seems, was not troubled by the fact that the agonizing state of the *Imām* he describes should have preceded his beheading.

We are dealing here with poetic exaggeration, quite common among the *marāthī* poets. One final example of this type of exaggeration may be seen in the work of 'Alī Ibn Iṣḥāq al-Zāhī. He represents a trend of exaggeration which continues to the present time, at least in Arabic and Persian poetry, the two languages familiar to the author. We have already seen the poet's extremism in regarding

Ḥusayn as the person through whom all existence subsists. In the poem we are about to consider, he paints in popular language a vivid and exaggerated picture of the women captives after the martyrdom of their protector.

. . . I can imagine Zaynab by Ḥusayn's side, her hair disheveled. There she stopped, rubbing her hair on his bleeding neck and displaying all her hidden sorrows.

And Fāṭimah [Ḥusayn's daughter] quaking with fear as she saw the whip coming down to strike her side.⁷⁷

The poet goes on to describe the death of Ḥusayn, how his head was carried on a spear to the Umayyad authorities, first in Kūfah and then in Damascus.

In the previous chapter, many orations were attributed to various members of the family of Ḥusayn after his death. While the orations display a great deal of rhetoric and a high degree of sophistication, (the poetry for the most part is written for popular audiences and clearly designed to be used in popular *ta'zīyah* celebrations. As usual, the first to raise the lamentation in verse was Zaynab, the woman who assumed responsibility for the orphans until they were brought back to Medina. As far as can be ascertained, the poem attributed to her is reported only in very late sources, perhaps not earlier than Majlisī's *Biḥār*, where it is quoted in its entirety.⁷⁸

Majlisī puts the poem in the context of a spontaneous *ta'zīyah majlis.*) He reports that while Umm Kulthūm, Ḥusayn's other sister, was reproaching the Kūfans for their treachery, the head of Ḥusayn was carried by. Seeing it, Zaynab could not control her emotions; she hit her forehead on the post of her litter and blood gushed out. Then she beckoned to the people to listen and lamented her brother in verse. She starts by expressing deep sorrow for her brother's fate and then goes on:

. . . O my brother, behold Fāṭimah [that is, his daughter]; speak to her for her heart is nigh melting.

O my brother, your compassionate heart towards us, why has it become hard as stone.

O my brother, if you could only see Zayn al-Ābidīn captive and

orphaned, unable to move. Each time he receives the painful blows, he cries to you in tears and humiliation.

O my brother, draw him to you, embrace him and calm his frightened heart.

How humiliating it is for an orphan to call upon his father when he is nowhere to come to his rescue.⁷⁹

It is clear that this poem is not intended to tell a story or report the details of the battle and its aftermath, but rather to present an imaginative picture of the sick youth, pathetic enough to inflame the emotions of the participants of the *ta'zīyah* celebration.) Here again our sources generally agree that the men of Ibn Sa'd's army were specifically ordered not to disturb the sick boy; as far as we know, this order was obeyed. But of course *Shī'ī* piety stopped at nothing in trying to portray the antagonists' cruelty toward the *Imām* and his family.

Another poem attributed to the *Imām's* sister, Umm Kulthūm, expresses the same sentiments as the poem we have just discussed. Umm Kulthūm's poem, however, is especially interesting in that we can see how it grew from a few verses in the early sources to a long and poorly constructed popular elegy.⁸⁰ In its abbreviated form, the poem is a statement of how the family of Ḥusayn left Medina with men and youths only to return orphaned and humiliated. 'O city, Medina of our grandfather, receive us not; for we return to you with sorrows and bereavements. We left you with a family intact, and we return to you with neither men nor sons.'⁸¹

In the longer version of the poem only the first verse is the same. The ideas expressed in the second and third verses are couched in much more popular language and drawn out over several verses. A hypothetical person is asked to relate the situation to the Prophet; he does so at considerable length. The same story is then told to Fāṭimah, with an emphasis on the captivity and persecution of the women. Another strange characteristic of this poem is that many of the words and expressions used in it are clearly Persian borrowings from the Arabic. Often both the grammar and meter are faulty. This may suggest that this poem in its final form had developed in an area where both Persian and Arabic were spoken. The elegy is undoubtedly

meant for the lamentation (*niyāḥah*) sessions. Umm Kulthūm addresses Fāṭimah thus:

. . . O Fāṭimah if you could only see your daughters captives and scattered in the lands.

. . . O Fāṭimah, what you have suffered at the hands of your enemies was not more than an inch (*qīrāt*) of what we have endured. Thus if you were still living, till the Day of Resurrection, you would have continued to sing the dirge for us . . .

After Fāṭimah, Ḥasan is addressed and the same story is repeated with slight variations. This poem is put together artificially, without much care for consistency: in the last verse, for example, it addresses not the people it is intended to address, but the supposed participants in the *ta'zīyah*: '. . . and this is my story and situation (*sharḥ ḥāl*), weep for us then all you who have heard me.'⁸²

One last poem worthy of note is a short elegy attributed to Ḥusayn's daughter Sukaynah. It has already been observed that Ḥusayn was especially fond of her; we are told further that before the battle, he patted her on the head (as was the custom to indicate the fact that a sad event was to be disclosed) and comforted her with a few sad verses.⁸³ Sukaynah's elegy is couched in very sophisticated language; the images and expressions employed are simple, yet tender and highly artistic.

She begins by declaring that her sorrow and grief will never end, and asks that her continuous weeping therefore be excused. She goes on to tell of Ḥusayn's martyrdom and abandonment, the cause of her weeping. As did her aunts and brother in prose, Sukaynah turns in verse to reproach for their unfaithfulness those who killed her father; she promises harsh retributions in the hereafter for all except those who joined his camp. Finally she vows again to weep all her life for her father's death: 'O my eye occupy yourself in weeping all your life; weep with tears of blood, not for a child, family or friends, rather for the son of the Apostle of God. Pour out your tears and blood. . . '⁸⁴

The last two verses echo a popular tale of the young daughter's continuous weeping after her father's death, to which we shall return soon. Here again, every member of the family of Ḥusayn has a role to play in the House of Sorrows, thus providing the needed example for

various members of the community. Sukaynah's role is usually that of the orphan child, serving as an example for mothers with young children and especially for young girls, who are called upon to emulate the tears of their example.

The poems we have been examining, especially those attributed to members of the Holy Family, emphasize quite strongly the element of lamentation.) Thus, they should be kept in mind as we now turn to a few examples specifically designed for use in the 'Āshūrā' celebration or in general *ta'zīyah n:ajālīs*. These elegies often have a special rhythm suited for accompaniment by a beating of the breast as the participants chant in unison the lamentation verses. The rhythm is of short staccato-like structure: a short meter is employed, often with intricate and quite varied rhymes. The poems constantly return to the first verse or verses, which express the main theme.

It will not be possible in this brief discussion of the Muḥarram poetry, especially lamentation poetry (*shī'r al-niyāḥah*) intended for the *ta'zīyah* celebration, to attempt anything resembling an adequate survey of the literature. The amount of material available to us in Arabic alone is truly vast and still growing. We shall therefore content ourselves with a few representative examples.

One typical and powerful elegy expresses the ideas we have been considering, and a great deal more. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Aḥmad al-Jurjānī al-Jawharī (d. ca. 380/990) opens his long *qaṣīdah* with a call to the faithful for weeping, whom he addresses as the 'People of 'Āshūrā'. None of the classical forms of Arabic poetry are followed; rather the poet immediately comes to the point of his call. The people of 'Āshūrā' are enjoined to remember that 'Āshūrā' was the day of the demise of Islām, the day the daughters of Muḥammad were taken captive as though they were the war captives of Byzantium or China. Thus the poet calls on the family of the Prophet to proclaim their grief and mourning. Each verse begins with the word 'today', then recounts one aspect after another of the tragedy, not an event of past history but as part of the here and now. Here are a few examples.

Today rose on the heights of al-Ṭaff [the hills of Karbalā'] their [the Holy Family's] mourner crying, 'Who is to care for an orphan or a sorrowful and humiliated captive.'

Today the grey beard of the Muṣṭafā [chosen one] was smeared with a blood which has become the perfume of the black-eyed houris. Today the flaming light of God was extinguished and the face of Islām flushed with anger and humiliation.⁸⁵

It is not sufficient, however, to talk in abstraction about the consequences of the tragedy; the poet recounts in detail the painful ordeal of Ḥusayn, his death at the hands of Muslims, and the reaction of the Christian monk of Qinnisrīn.⁸⁶ The monk reproaches vehemently the evildoers, professes Islām, and in the end is cut to pieces by the mob for his harsh words and loyalty to the severed head of the *Imām*. As the poet begins with a general call for weeping, so he ends with an injunction to his own eyes to shed their tears. ' . . . O my eye leave no tears for the morrow or for any other sorrowful man. Rather cry aloud, and hide no pearls [that is, tears] you have in store, for a sacred tomb in Karbalā'.⁸⁷

It was observed above that the poems of lamentation (*niyāḥah*) are rhythmically well-suited for chanting to the accompaniment of a measured beating of the breast. An interesting example of this is provided by the famous poet al-Nāshī' al-Ṣaghīr (Alī b. Wāṣif, who himself led many lamentation sessions in the fifth/eleventh century, in Baghdad and other important centers of the Muslim world. The poem is divided into stanzas of three verses; the third always rhymes with the last verse of the preceding stanza. The meter is generally short with a conscious attempt at imitating or at least stimulating a measured beating of the breast. It will not be possible to demonstrate this interesting structure in translation, but the themes and ideas of the poems are introduced with an abruptness that accords well with the rhythmic structure.

This poem is especially interesting for its terse language, and the pathetic picture it presents of *Imām* Ḥusayn pleading for mercy, but to no avail. This form of dramatic narrative cast in the third person, but here and there interspersed with first-person statements as the *Imām* is made to tell his own story, gives this poetry a particularly powerful character. It allows the audience to empathize with the characters of the tragedy and share emotionally in their sorrows and pains. Perhaps the later Muḥarram passion play grew out of this poetic idiom. In the

passion play, the characters are represented by actual persons; the acting, however, remains minimal, the emphasis placed instead on scenery and dialogue. We can see the trend from a narrated dialogue to one between real persons, then from word pictures to actual stage presentations.

Al-Nāshi' begins his elegy by rhetorically asking Sukaynah, Ḥusayn's daughter, whether her heart was not stricken with grief for the death of Ḥusayn and Ḥasan. He answers his own question by declaring that she suffered terrible thirst and sorrow and that every member of her body shed tears. Ḥusayn then takes up the dialogue, reminding his opponents of his noble lineage, and begging for a drink of water for his little infant. Of course, the people insist that the thirst of the infant would never be quenched until Ḥusayn submits to the authority of the usurpers. He refuses and chooses to fight instead. With pointed rapidity, the poet portrays the sorrows of the Holy Family in the person of Ḥusayn's young daughter, the thirst of an innocent infant, and the frustration of Ḥusayn, left with no choice but to sacrifice both the infant and his own life.

Having created the proper atmosphere of empathy and sorrow, the poet goes on with his story:

. . . Thus they agreed on betraying him and gathered together to kill him, to slay him with his infant, and the blades were sharpened. They pillaged his den (*arīn*) [likening the *Imām* to a lion] and stained his forehead with blood and soil.

. . . They violated the sanctity of his women and slew his suckling babe; they found his sick youth, and his wives they took captive. . .

They [the women] cried 'O Muḥammad! O our grandfather Aḥmad, behold us taken captive by slaves and all of us are in mourning.'⁸⁸

Finally the poet renews his call for weeping, '. . . O my eyes, pour out your tears for the children of the Prophet's daughter. Shed your copious tears without ceasing, for thus should a wise man weep.'⁸⁹

It is not possible to do complete justice to (this genre of poetry, as it varies so much, not only from culture to culture but even within each culture) Men and women extemporize colloquial elegies as the need arises. Many of these are on a very popular level, never written down.

In many cases a mourning man or woman leader chooses any one of the themes discussed in this study and extemporizes verses, displaying all the ornamentation in the poetic and hagiographic idiom of which imagination is capable.

One of the most common techniques used in *niyāḥah* poetry, examples of which have already been discussed, is that of using one of the women of the Holy Family as a speaker; she recounts the tale of the suffering of the *Imām* and his family to another dead family member, whether the Prophet, the mother of the *Imām* or, less commonly, his father or dead brother Ḥasan. The elegy we are about to consider is an interesting one in that the speaker is Fāṭimah, the eternal weeper. She does not relate a story, but rather shows pathetic love and concern for her dead son. Ḥusayn, who was over fifty years old at the time of his martyrdom, is portrayed as a child physically in need of a mother's care. Tearfully, Fāṭimah asks how the various details of her son's burial were executed. It is perhaps better to let the poem speak for itself:

How great is my grief for you, O my child, you who are the one lost to friends and family.

Again I say how great is my sorrow, O my child, for after you I shall desert sleep and even sleeplessness.

Woe is me, who took care of his shrouding, who beheld his face, throat and eyes.

Woe, woe is me, who did wash him and walk behind his bier.

Woe, woe is me, who did pray over him and lay him in his grave.⁹⁰

This popular and powerful poem was consciously composed for the *ta'zīyah majālis*. After the dramatic picture of a helpless man, who in life could not defend himself, and after death had no one to give him a proper burial, the poet concludes with an expression of his hope and the hope of the community in general for the coming of the *Mahdī* who will lead the victorious army of God and avenge the blood of his martyred forebear. Moreover, the poem is put in the context of a moving tale, a sort of apocalyptic dream which Sukaynah had in Damascus at the house of Yazīd.

The young girl sees all the prophets and holy women of old, among them Muḥammad and his daughter Fāṭimah. The little girl runs to her

grandmother to complain of what befell them at the hands of their enemies. Fāṭimah, the blood-stained shirt of Ḥusayn pressed to her bosom, utters a loud and pathetic cry, raising a lamentation with the dirge just cited.

Perhaps the poet knows, as well as his audience, that the picture presented is not the actual story. Yet, while the *ta'zīyah majlis* lasts, myth transcends itself; for the moment, it becomes history. For the historian of religion, however, the myth actually becomes part of history: the history not of the event, but of the community's understanding and interiorization of it, the history not of historical facts, but of the way the community has lived them. This interiorization of the drama of Karbalā' is powerfully expressed in the *zīyārah* ritual. Through this ritual the community renews its covenant with and its loyalty to the *imāms*, and in a very personal way renews its own participation in this drama. We shall end this chapter, therefore, with a consideration of the *zīyārah* ritual: its major themes, its structure and performance.

5.4 THE *Zīyārah* RITUAL AND ITS PLACE IN *Shī'ī* PIETY

The sanctity of a particular place as the shrine of a holy man or woman, or as the place of a theophany, is a well known phenomenon in man's religious history. The case of Karbalā' is a typical one. As it gained significance for *Shī'īs* more recently than did the ancient *Ka'bah* for Muslims or the holy house of Jerusalem, it was necessary first to identify this new spot with earlier sacred places to give it equal prominence and sanctity. This the *imāms*, or more probably their followers after them, did with all the usual exaggeration of an apologetic and persecuted community. It would not be useful to consider the traditions concerning the Karbalā' piety chronologically because we cannot discern any chronological development. We shall, therefore, examine a few of the traditions beginning with the more moderate ones, and going on to those which are extreme.

The sixth *Imām*, Ja'far, declared to the pilgrims that his great grandfather's tomb, '*al-ghādirīyyah* [i.e., the whole area of Karbalā' and its environs] is of the earth of the Holy House (*bayt al-maqdis*)'.⁹¹ The

sacred house of the *Kaʿbah* is known as the *ḥaram*, meaning the place both of sanctity and safety.⁹² In the previous chapter, Karbalāʾ was characterized as *ḥaram*, in a statement that Ḥusayn made to the believers of the *jinn* who came to lend him support and destroy his enemies.⁹³ His son, Zayn al-Ābidīn, not only affirms his father's claim, but goes far beyond it. If the tradition we are about to quote is genuinely his, then we can hardly speak of any development of the Karbalāʾ piety as such.⁹⁴ Rather (the spot of the grave of Ḥusayn began to share in the *Imām*'s sanctity almost immediately after his death. This is probable because a strong emphasis on pilgrimage to Karbalāʾ developed immediately and soon led the authorities to destroy the tomb and forbid this pious act. The fourth *Imām* told his followers that:

God made the spot of Karbalāʾ a sacred and safe *ḥaram* 24,000 years before He created the earth of the *Kaʿbah* and made it a sacred and secure *ḥaram*. When, moreover, God [exalted be He] shall cause the earth to quake and be melted, K̄arbalāʾ shall be lifted up as it is, luminous and pure, and placed in the highest of the gardens of paradise. It shall be made the most exalted abode wherein only prophets and apostles shall dwell.⁹⁵

Here the *Imām* places Karbalāʾ on an equal, if not higher, stage in creation than the *Kaʿbah* and claims for it a primordial place, more exalted than is usually accorded the ancient house of Mecca. He does not stop there, however; rather, in the rest of his statement, he claims that Karbalāʾ shall be the resplendent star whose light shall dazzle the eyes of all inhabitants of the earth. It shall cry out with rightful pride, ' . . . I am God's earth, sacred, pure and blessed, for in me is contained the master of all the martyrs and master of the youths of paradise.'⁹⁶

As usual, however, it is to the sixth *Imām* that we have to turn for the most apocalyptic and polemical traditions. Unlike his grandfather, who was satisfied with a high claim for Karbalāʾ without challenging the status of the *Kaʿbah* in Islām, Jāʿfar sharply contrasts the two spots so that the *Kaʿbah* is all but damned by God himself. This tradition, typical of so many attributed to him, displays all the marks of a fantastic myth. The *Imām* declared that when God created the *Kaʿbah*, it waxed proud, saying, ' . . . who is like me when God had built His

house upon me, and men flocked to me from every place, and God made me His secure *ḥaram*!⁹⁷ But God commanded the spot of the *Ka'bah* to be humble and silent before Karbalā', for its high favor, compared to the latter, is no more than a needle dipped in the sea which carries some of its water. Great favor has been bestowed on Karbalā' because it contains the remains of the martyred *Imām*. Thus God continued:

. . . Had it not been for the sake of him whom the earth of Karbalā' contains I would never have created thee or the house on which thou pridest thyself. Be quiet therefore and hold thy peace, be a humble earth, meek and humiliated before the spot of Karbalā', or I will cause thee to melt and be thrown into the fire of hell.⁹⁸

No doubt traditions like these drew, and still continue to draw, large crowds of men and women to the holy shrine. In fact, at many points in Muslim history, and especially in times of strife between Safavid Iran and the Ottoman rulers, pilgrimage to the shrine of Karbalā' took the place of the *ḥajj*. The sixth *Imām*, who lived most of his life in Medina, stopped at nothing to entice his followers to visit the tomb of his martyred forebear. We shall discuss presently some of the great rewards promised to those who undertake the journey to the banks of the Euphrates, especially under perilous conditions.

It was not enough, however, to offer promises of future rewards; rather, the sanctity of Karbalā' rendered its soil a source of blessing and healing in this life. We are told that 'God recompensed Ḥusayn [for his martyrdom] in that He rendered supplications answered at his shrine, and the healing [of every disease] in the soil of his tomb.'⁹⁹ Many traditions enjoin the faithful to apply the sacred soil to their sick members, or to drink it mixed with water in case of an internal ailment. The soil of Karbalā' is potent in itself, hence the faithful should keep it in a clean place, and recite praise to God and prayers upon the Prophet and his family over it, lest the devil or other evil spirits of the *jinn* contaminate it. The sacred soil could lose its magical healing power if not specially guarded and treated.¹⁰⁰

The sanctity of Karbalā' was declared by God himself through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet; not only is its sacred character affirmed, but the history of its shrine is foretold in the famous tradition to which

we have often referred in this study, attributed to 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, and reported on the authority of his aunt Zaynab. This tradition has the prestige of being in some way a divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*); moreover, it presents a complete *Shīʿī* eschatological picture. We shall quote at some length the portion dealing with Ḥusayn and his shrine.

. . . And when this group of men [Ḥusayn and his companions] will have departed to their final resting places, God himself will undertake the receiving of their souls with His own hand. Then will descend from the seventh heaven multitudes of angels with vessels of emeralds and rubies filled with the waters of life, and paradisaical garments and perfumes. They will wash their corpses with that water, dress them with those garments and embalm them with that perfume. Then God shall send people of thy *ummah* [Muḥammad's community] whom the people of unbelief (*kufṛ*) will not know, and who had not taken part in shedding the blood [of those men] in word, thought or deed. They will bury those corpses and raise a sign for the grave of the master of martyrs. It shall be a beacon for the people of truth, and the means for the faithful (*mu'minīn*) of final victory, and the delight of angels. From every heaven there will come 100,000 angels every day and night, praying over him, and circumambulating his shrine. They shall incessantly offer praise to God at his grave, and beg forgiveness for his pilgrims. They will record the names of those who will flock to him, those who seek by this only nearness to God and to thee O Muḥammad.¹⁰¹

The fourth *Imām* goes on to relate the divine message regarding the devotees who would flock in pilgrimage to the grave of his father. Finally, returning again to the shrine of Karbalā', he continues '. . . and there will be men on whom God's curse and wrath will surely fall, who will strive to efface all traces of that grave, but God will not permit them to accomplish their evil intent'.¹⁰² It must be observed that if, indeed, people like al-Mutawakkil did try to efface all traces of the sacred tomb, they could not efface them from the hearts of the *imāms'* followers.

The sacred tomb of the *Imām* in Karbalā' has never been without its crowds of pilgrims. Unlike the *hajj* which is limited to a special session, the *ziyārah* of *Imām* Ḥusayn is possible, and equally effective,

at any time and even at any place. When the author visited the shrine in May 1971, not during the special *zīyārah* season, the place thronged with crowds of pilgrims from many lands. It is now, as it has always been, a true house of tears and sighs to which the pious *Shī'īs* bring their joys and sorrows, to offer thanks to God and the *Imām* for their successes and supplications for their hardships and pains.¹⁰³

We saw in Chapter 1 how predictions of the sufferings and persecutions of the Holy Family were often set against the background of a happy and intimate family gathering. It is probable, in our view, that most such traditions are variations of the cloak (*kisā'*) incident; many of them include it. In early tradition, the Prophet was in the house of 'Alī, sharing with its members the usual meagre meal. As in such tales of dramatic contrast, the mood of the Apostle of God suddenly changed from manifest pleasure to sorrow and tears. The dramatic effect in this tradition seems to be quite consciously intended. No one dared to ask the Prophet the reason for his weeping; but Ḥusayn, still a young boy, jumped on his grandfather's lap and inquired about the cause of his sorrow. The Prophet replied that Gabriel had come to announce the calamities that were to befall the Holy Family, and thus snatched away that brief moment of happiness. The main purpose of this tradition is to accord prophetic sanction to the pilgrimage to the shrine of Karbalā' and to assure the faithful of great rewards for its performance. Thus Ḥusayn asked:

. . . O father, what shall be the reward of those who visit our graves, scattered as they will be in the earth? [The Prophet answered] These will be men and women of my community who would make pilgrimage to your grave seeking blessing by this act. It will be incumbent upon me to seek them out on the Day of Resurrection and save them from the awful fears of that hour and from all their transgressions: and God would cause them to dwell in paradise.¹⁰⁴

The *zīyārah* therefore may be regarded as an act of covenant renewal between the Holy Family and their followers. This covenant, to be sure, is a covenant of love, sincere obedience and devotion on the part of the community, and, on the part of the Holy Family, of returned love, compassion and the promise of high rewards and intercession in the world to come. This phenomenon in Islām is not totally unlike the

relationship we see between the community of ancient Israel and Yahweh or between most of the ancient communities of the Near East and their gods, for that matter.

We cannot enter any further into the interesting comparison of this phenomenon in Islām with its ancient counterparts in Near Eastern religious traditions. The *zīyārah* ritual, however, is integrated into the history of the ancient prophets, and claimed as an emulation of a divine act. We are told that a man went secretly one night to visit the tomb of Ḥusayn; he was met near the shrine by an angel in human form who ordered him to wait until dawn because Moses, the prophet, had asked permission from God to perform the sacred pilgrimage, and he, with a retinue of 70,000 angels, was spending the night at the *Imām*'s tomb.¹⁰⁵

An even more interesting connection with the ancient prophets is one established between the spot of the sacred grave and the birth of Jesus. The Qur'ān suggests that Mary, the mother of Jesus, fearing the reaction of the people to her giving birth to a child out of wedlock, took the newborn infant and retreated to a faraway place.¹⁰⁶ 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, when asked concerning the location of her place of retreat, answered, 'She set out from Damascus until she reached Karbalā', and there, on the spot of Ḥusayn's tomb, she left the child and returned on the same night.'¹⁰⁷ That this account, besides being quite fantastic, could hardly agree with the Qur'ānic story of the birth of Jesus did not seem to disturb the *Imām* or whoever of his followers was responsible for it. One reason for this connection between the ancient prophet and the persecuted *Imām* may be that Jesus and his mother, according to Islāmic tradition, were suspected by their people, and thus were in need of divine proof and vindication. They were, according to the Qur'ānic account, vindicated. Nonetheless, their situation was analogous to that of the *imāms*, whose authority and status were questioned by the people, if not altogether rejected by the majority. The vindication of the ancient prophet, therefore, is fittingly linked to the tomb of the *Imām* who suffered the greatest wrong. The tradition may also suggest that the favor of vindication was granted the ancient prophet and his mother for the sake of the martyred *Imām* on the spot of his burial.

One of the followers of the sixth *Imām*, Ṣafwān al-Jammāl, on whose authority some important *zīyārah* traditions were reported,

came one day to visit him apparently in Medina. Şafwān, it seems, lived in Iraq and paid his visit to the *Imām* during the *hajj* season. The sixth *Imām* asked Şafwān if he frequented the tomb of Ḥusayn, and he answered affirmatively. Şafwān asked in turn if the *Imām* himself visited the sacred shrine also. The sixth *Imām* answered,

. . . How could I not visit it when God himself visits it every Friday night. He descends to it with the angels, prophets and vicegerents. He descends with Muḥammad, the best of prophets and us, his vicegerents, the best of vicegerents.

Şafwān asked again in astonishment, 'Then you make a pilgrimage to him [Ḥusayn] . . . and thus achieve a pilgrimage to God himself.' 'Yes', said the *Imām*, 'Hold fast to this and you will be accorded the same merit as though you have performed this same pilgrimage, and that is truly a favor, yes, truly a favor.'¹⁰⁸ This interesting tradition perhaps reaches the ultimate limit of anthropocentrism within Islāmic doctrine, but it is doubtful that it can be accepted at its face value by most Muslims, including moderate *Shī'īs*. It goes also as far as it is possible to go in enticing pious *Shī'īs* to sacrifice everything for the great honor of the pilgrimage. A tradition is often reported on the authority of many of the *imāms*, with minor variations, that 'anyone making pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn acknowledging his right [that is, to the imamate] would be as though he had made pilgrimage to God on His throne'.¹⁰⁹ Modern editors of early sources reporting this tradition go out of their way to try to explain it metaphorically. Nonetheless, it is clear that it was important for the *imāms* themselves, and certainly for the community, to preserve the Muḥarram cultus in its entirety. To that end, neither the *imāms* nor their disciples spared anything.

The highest reward promised those who frequent the tomb of Ḥusayn is declared to be the honor of being his close companion in paradise. They will sit and converse with him under the divine throne; this they will prefer to all the pleasure of paradise:

. . . they would be told 'Enter paradise,' but they would refuse . . . and the houris would send messengers to them saying 'come to us, for we long for you as do the everlasting youths' (*wildān*),¹¹⁰ but

they would not even raise their heads to listen to them because of the great bliss and favor they shall experience in Ḥusayn's company.¹¹¹

The tradition goes on to describe the terrible state of their enemies and their great fear and torments on that day. Finally, it concludes with a dramatic description of the great pomp with which Ḥusayn's companions will be carried on splendid mounts to their mansions in paradise.¹¹²

These are but a few examples of the great rewards promised in return for the sacred pilgrimage. We are further told that whoever spends of his wealth to make pilgrimage to Ḥusayn will enter paradise without reckoning. Any man who is beaten for making a pilgrimage will be given for every strike a *hourī*, and for any pain, a thousand merits (*ḥasanāt*). The man who is killed for his devotion to the Holy Family and his determination to visit Ḥusayn's grave is a true martyr. Angels will clean his substance, literally clay (*tīnah*), until it is as pure as the clay of the prophets. With the first drop of his blood, God will forgive all his sins. After his death, a door will open from his grave to paradise, through which its fragrance will blow to comfort him. He will not experience the reckoning and torment of the grave; on the Day of Resurrection, he will be raised with the prophets; with them and the angels he will be taken up to heaven to sing divine praises before the throne of majesty.¹¹³ In fact, in the minds of the *imāms* and their immediate followers, such great merits are granted not so much for the act of the pilgrimage itself, but more perhaps for the difficulties Shī'ī Muslims had to face in performing it. As we shall see presently the *zīyārah* can be brief, lasting no more than the few moments spent at the sacred tomb, or it can be performed anywhere facing in its direction.

Before we describe a few *zīyārah* rituals, both at the tomb and elsewhere, a word may be in order concerning the attitude of proper reverence.¹¹⁴ It has already been observed that the *zīyārah* ritual may be regarded as an act of covenant renewal between the pilgrims and the *imāms*. Furthermore, through the *zīyārah*, the pilgrim participates directly in the sufferings and sorrows of the martyr of Karbalā': the devotees emulate, as far as possible, the sufferings of their *Imām*. Thus, the sixth *Imām*, al-Ṣādiq, enjoined his followers, 'If you wish to visit

the grave of Ḥusayn, do so in a state of sorrow and grief; be hungry and thirsty, for Ḥusayn died sorrowful, hungry and thirsty.¹¹⁵)

Another way in which this identification between the *Imām* and his devotees may be seen is the special significance attributed to the pilgrimage on the day of 'Āshūrā'. The sixth *Imām* declared that:

Whoever spends the night of 'Āshūrā' at the grave of Ḥusayn would meet God on the Day of Resurrection, stained with his blood as though he had fought with Ḥusayn on the plain of Karbalā'.¹¹⁶

In a similar tradition, the sixth *Imām* declares that such a devotee would be stained not with his own blood, but rather with the blood of Ḥusayn, and would be counted among those who were martyred with him.¹¹⁷

In myth and ritual, time and space are treated as loci of the sacred. Karbalā' has its special significance in *Shī'ī* piety because it is the locus of the sacred remains of the *Imām*; similarly, the day of 'Āshūrā' is especially sacred because it is the locus, so to speak, of his sufferings. Hence, performing the *zīyārah* ritual in Karbalā' on the day of 'Āshūrā' has great merit. We shall now examine a few of the major themes of the *zīyārah* liturgy, and describe briefly its performance. In the appendix to this chapter an important text of a *zīyārah* attributed to the twelfth *Imām*, the *Mahdī*, will be discussed in some detail.

The shrine of Karbalā' is held by *Shī'ī* piety to be equal in the eyes of God to the ancient shrine of Mecca, the holy city of Islām, if not more exalted. Similarly, pilgrimage to the shrine of Karbalā' is at least as meritorious as the obligatory *hajj*, the sacred pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, if not more so. To a certain man who came on a pilgrimage to the grave of Ḥusayn from far off Yemen for no reason but to visit the sacred tomb and offer supplications to God, the sixth *Imām* declared that one pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn equals 30 pilgrimages in the company of the Apostle of God, with all their rites of 'umrah, the lesser pilgrimage. Thus his reward was equal to his unselfish devotion to the wronged *Imām*.¹¹⁸ (The fifth *Imām*, al-Bāqir, was even more generous than his son. He declared in a long dialogue with one of his followers that one pilgrimage to Karbalā' on the day of 'Āshūrā' is equal to a thousand thousand *hajj* pilgrimages and an equal number of engagements in the holy war with the prophets.¹¹⁹)

The man asked what he should do if he lived too far away to be able to perform the *zīyārah* rites at the sacred shrine on the day of 'Āshūrā'. The *Imām* instructed him to perform the following *zīyārah*, one of the earliest and most popular liturgical pieces of the *zīyārah* literature.¹²⁰ A man in a distant country should go to the wilderness, or up onto a high roof in his own house; then turn his face toward Karbalā' and pronounce many salutations of peace on the martyred *Imām* and curses on his murderers. He should then offer two prostrations of prayer (*rak'ahs*) in the middle of the day, after which he should hold a mourning session (*ma'tam*) in his house to which he should invite all his friends and relatives. The attitude enjoined is one of total immersion in the tragedy, as though it had just been witnessed by the participants. The participants should offer each other condolences, saying, 'May God grant us great rewards for our bereavement of Ḥusayn, and count us among those who will exact vengeance for his blood with His friend (*walī*) the well guided (*Mahdī*) *Imām* of the family of Muḥammad.'¹²¹

The actual *zīyārah* petition (*du'ā'*) then follows. It is an eloquent confession of absolute loyalty to the *imāms* and total disassociation (*barā'ah*) from their enemies. In this *zīyārah* as in most others of the same genre, we see a great display of emotions: love and hatred, meekness and fervent hope are contrasted with violent and hostile anger, frustration and impatient anticipation. The devotee's love for and loyalty to the *imāms* is equalled by his hatred and hostility for their enemies, the Umayyads and their agents. He is meek and sorrowful for the sufferings of the *Imām* and his companions, but flaming with zeal to be in the victorious army of the *Mahdī*, to take part in avenging Ḥusayn's sacred blood. The text under discussion is a long repetition of these themes. Here we quote only a few short passages, each repeated a hundred times by the participants led by a chanter. A trance-like state seizes the participants as they repeat over and over again these invocations of curse and blessings, loyalty and hostility, making this experience a powerful one:

. . . O God, curse him who usurped the rights of Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad and his supporters from the first to the last of them. O God, curse the group that gathered together for the

killing of Ḥusayn and pledged allegiance to his enemies to kill him and his companions; O God, curse them all.¹²²

This outburst of condemnation is followed by an invocation of peace and humble loyalty to the *Imām*, again repeated a hundred times.

Peace be upon you, O Abū ‘Abdallāh, and upon the spirits of those who dwell in your spacious house. . . . From me to you is a salutation of God’s peace as long as I live and day and night follow one another. May God not make this my last *zīyārah* to you. Peace be upon Ḥusayn and upon ‘Alī, son of Ḥusayn and upon the companions of Ḥusayn, on them all be God’s peace, prayers, and blessings.¹²³

The *zīyārah* ends with a petition, uttered in prostration, for Ḥusayn’s intercession and praise to God.

This *zīyārah*, simple only in its ritualistic structure, may be contrasted with others designed to be performed at the tomb itself. These call for prostrations, genuflections and circumambulations of the shrine. Most, if not all, such *zīyārāt* share the same themes. First, the salutation of peace to the *Imām*, his family and friends is pronounced, followed by a profession of faith in *walāyah* (spiritual and temporal authority) of the *imāms*, curses on their enemies, and finally an expression of the fervent hope of the devotees to be among those who avenge the sacred blood of the martyrs with the *Mahdī*.¹²⁴ We shall analyze briefly one quite interesting *zīyārah* of this genre which the *Imām* al-Šādiq taught two of his prominent disciples, Yūnus and al-Mufaḍḍal.

The text under consideration is especially significant because it expresses many of the themes of sorrow and revenge already discussed in this and the previous chapters of this study. This *zīyārah* introduces the theme of the dependence of all things in creation on the existence of the *imāms* as well. After the pronouncements of peace on the martyrs surrounding the *Imām*, the pilgrim addresses *Imām* Ḥusayn:

Peace be upon you, O martyr (*qatīl*) of God and son of His martyr . . . the object of the vengeance (*tha’r*) of God and son of His *tha’r*, and the one to be avenged by the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth. I bear witness that your blood dwells in the abodes of eternity

(*khuld*) and that for it the confines of the divine throne quaked, and that it was mourned by all creatures. The seven heavens and seven earths, and all that live in them, the inhabitants of paradise and hell, and all things visible and invisible of God's creation wept for it.¹²⁵

The pilgrim declares himself to be a humble slave (*abd*) of God and an obedient servant (*mawlā*) of the *Imām*. The *imāms* alone render possible God's mercy and the reward of paradise; thus the pilgrim repeats three times, 'Whoever wishes to approach God must begin with you [the *imāms*].'¹²⁶

It is a well known phenomenon in the history of religion that God acts in nature and history through special persons on whom depend the preservation of order and harmony in creation. The Logos of the fourth Gospel, through which all things were made, may be taken as a good example. The Prophet and his family come very close to occupying a similar exalted position for *Shī'ī* Muslims. The pilgrim therefore continues to emphasize the role the *imāms* play in his salvation and the ongoing natural processes:

Through you [the *imāms*] God causes falsehood to be exposed and evil times to be taken away. Through you, God blots out what He wills and establishes what He wills, and through you He removes slavery and humiliation from our necks. Through you God takes revenge for the blood of every believer [man and woman] that must be exacted. Through you the earth brings forth its trees, and trees bear their fruits. Through you the sky sends down its rain and sustenance. Through you God takes away all sorrow and calamity . . . through you the earth, which carries your bodies, glorifies God, and through you its mountains are fixed in their places.¹²⁷

The *zīyārah* ends with the usual curses upon the murderers of Ḥusayn and his companions, and salutations of peace upon him and his fellow martyrs.

Another liturgical *zīyārah* text which we shall briefly examine is one of the oldest and perhaps one of the best examples of liturgical prayers. Unlike the *zīyārahs* we have discussed so far, it has fewer invocatory prayers and many more prayers of thanksgiving and profession of faith in God, devotion to the *imāms* and acceptance of their *walāyah*.

The profession of faith is not limited to the *shahādah*, but includes the affirmation of the reality or truth of death, the reckoning of the grave, resurrection and final judgment.

After all this, the pilgrim addresses the *Imām* and his companions with salutations of peace, and affirms once more his unswerving devotion to the *Imām*. He declares that the grave where he stands is the grave of the beloved of Muḥammad, who is the beloved of God; that the *Imām* did truly struggle in the way of God in order to bring men from darkness into light, from error and falsehood to the gate of true guidance. Therefore, the pilgrim comes to reaffirm his covenant with the *Imām* and express disapprobation of the *Imām*'s enemies, whom he curses in long and eloquent imprecations.

Finally, the pilgrim affirms the continuity of the *imāms* with the prophets by stating, after the invocation of peace, that the *Imām* is the heir of Adam, the pure one (*ṣafwah*) of God, of Noah the prophet of God, of Moses, the interlocutor of God, of Jesus, the spirit of God, of Muḥammad, the beloved of God, and the two previous *Imāms*, 'Alī, his father, and Ḥasan, his brother. The pilgrim attests that the *Imām* is the great light guiding to the right way.

. . . You are a light in the exalted loins [of prophets], a light in the darkness of the earth, a light in the air, and a light in the heavens on high. In all these you were a light that would never be extinguished, and the one whose speech is the word of truth and guidance.¹²⁸

The text under consideration provides one of the longest and most complete *ziyārahs*. The pilgrim is reminded of all the ideas and events surrounding Karbalā' and the hopes of vindication which bind him to the *imāms*. The text displays great eloquence and imagination, and even a spontaneous lack of systematization characteristic of the best liturgical literature.

Since our concern in this chapter has been the remembrance of *Imām* Ḥusayn and his special place in *Shī'ī* piety, we have limited ourselves to his *ziyārah* to the exclusion of those of the other *imāms*. There are, however, *ziyārahs* for each of the *imāms* individually and for all of them collectively as well. One collective *ziyārah* deserves a few remarks on account of the ideas it expresses about the relationship of the *imāms* to God on the one hand, and to the community on the other. The text of

this *zīyārah* is attributed to the eighth *Imām*, al-Riḍā. The *zīyārah* begins as usual with invocations of peace on the *imāms*, but does not mention their names until nearly the end of the text. It begins:

Peace upon them who are the locus of the knowledge of God. Peace upon them who are the dwelling place of the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God. Peace upon them who are the manifestation of God's command (*amr*) and His prohibition (*nahī*). Peace upon them: whoever accepts their authority (*walāyah*) would have accepted God's authority, and whoever shows hostility to them would have shown hostility to God. Peace upon them; whoever knows them would have known God, and whoever acknowledges them not would have denied God. Peace be upon them; whoever seeks protection (*i'tasama*) in them would have sought protection in God and whoever abandons them would have abandoned God.¹²⁹

Having affirmed faith in the *imāms* and their status with God, the pilgrim then goes on to affirm his loyalty to them and calls to witness the sincerity of his devotion.

I call God to witness that I am peace (*šilm*) to him who peacefully submits to you, and war to him who wars against you. I believe in all your secret and open manifestations, and delegate to you all my affairs.¹³⁰

The *zīyārah* ends with the usual curses on the enemies of the *imāms* and prayers upon the Prophet and the *imāms*, naming them individually.

This last *zīyārah* text suggests strongly, especially in the original Arabic, the absolute loyalty of the community to the *imāms*, a loyalty not only spiritual but also political. The words, 'I am peace to him who peacefully submits to you and war to him who wars against you (*anā šilmun li-man sālamakum wa-ḥarbun li-man ḥārabakum*)' are not meant metaphorically, but concretely. This affirmation of allegiance, the *bay'ah* to the *imāms*, has its own special *zīyārah*. We shall end this chapter with a brief discussion of an interesting *zīyārah*, known as *zīyārat al-muṣāfaqah*, the giving of the *bay'ah*; and with a prayer of the sixth *Imām* affirming this sacred pact with the community of the faithful.

The *zīyārah* we are about to discuss, of unknown authorship, was

copied by al-Majlisī from an old *zīyārah* collection whose author is not identified.¹³¹ The Arabic word *muṣāfaqah* comes from the root *ṣafaqa*, meaning to strike one's hand on that of another in accepting an agreement or pact. It is also used to signify the conclusion of a pact of allegiance (*bay'ah*) between an individual and a leader. It, therefore presupposes the actual presence of the two parties to the pact. It is important to keep this in mind, because the *imāms*, for the *Shī'ī* community, are not simply persons no longer present; they are seen to be omnipresent in the community, hearing the petitions of its members and demanding their unbroken allegiance, love and loyalty. Appropriately, therefore, this *zīyārah* is to be performed at the grave of *Imām Ḥusayn*, that is, at the spot where his concrete presence is presupposed.

For the most part, the text speaks for itself; thus we shall quote it at some length. By way of initial greeting and paying of respect, the pilgrim begins with these words:

I come, O my master, to you a pilgrim offering my salutation of peace upon you. I come seeking refuge in you and fleeing to you. I come to renew my covenant and my *bay'ah* to which God had bound my neck. It is the covenant and pledge of acceptance, demanded of me by God, of your *walāyah* and dissociation from all your enemies. I come affirming and confessing anew that obedience which God had made obligatory upon all men.¹³²

The pilgrim is then to place his right hand on the tomb in the manner of a man offering the *bay'ah* and to address the *Imām*, saying:

Here is my hand spread out (*muṣāfiqah*) to you in *bay'ah* . . . accept therefore this of me, O my *Imām*. For I come to you cognizant of what God has made obligatory upon us of rendering support (*nuṣrah*) to you.¹³³

If the devotee sincerely pledges a renewal of his covenant, then he may be assured of the *Imām's* adherence to his own side of the covenant. This assurance is declared by the pilgrim on behalf of the *Imām* in the words:

. . . O my master and *Imām* . . . I bear witness that you have kept your covenant. . . as you have promised him who comes to you as a pilgrim to fulfill all that which he hopes for of your goodness.

To you I have come from my country placing on you my reliance before God. Fulfill therefore my hope in you.¹³⁴

The pilgrim ends with a petition (*du'ā'*) that he may be included in the company of the Holy Family in this world and in the world to come.

It was suggested above that the *zīyārah* pilgrimage to the tomb of *Imām* Ḥusayn often entailed many hardships for the pilgrims. It must be added here that the *imāms* were cognizant of this fact, as well as of the general disadvantage their followers had to face as a small minority in the Muslim community. The sixth *Imām* lifted up his hands one day to heaven, and in tears prayed:

O God these [the *Shī'īs*] are but a small group of people. Make therefore our life their life and our death their death. Do not set over them an enemy of Thine that Thou mayest not bereave us of them. For if Thou wouldst bereave us of them, Thou wouldst never be truly worshipped in Thine earth.¹³⁵

More moving still is the *Imām*'s prayer for the pilgrims to the tomb of his grandfather, the wronged martyr. In this prayer we see a grateful recognition by the *Imām* of the sacrifice and devotion of his pious followers as he poured out his heart before God on their behalf. In a way this prayer may be regarded as an intercessory petition similar to the prayer of Christ for his disciples before his passion, as reported in the fourth Gospel.¹³⁶ Yet unlike Christ's prayer, the prayer of the *Imām* retains all the Islāmic elements of the *zīyārah* tradition of which it is a part.

Mu'āwīyah Ibn Wahb, one of the sixth *Imām*'s close disciples, entered the *Imām*'s house one day and found him on his prayer rug, uttering the following invocation after his prayers:

O God, Thou who hast chosen us for Thy special favor, promised us the gift of intercession, granted us the vicegerency (*waṣīyyah*), given us the knowledge of what is past and what is to come and caused the hearts of men to incline towards us, forgive me and my brethren. Forgive the pilgrims to the grave of my grandfather Ḥusayn, those who have spent their wealth in their desire to show their loyalty to us, and in hope for that which Thou, for our sake, hast in store for them. This they did for the joy they would bring to the heart of Thy

Prophet, wishing only to obey our command and thus bring anger and fury to the hearts of our enemies. In all this they wish only Thy good pleasure. Reward them therefore with Thy pleasure in them. Protect them in the night and day, and reward well their families and children whom they have left behind. Go with them and protect them against the evil of every powerful and weak man among Thy creatures and the evil of the satans of men and *jinn*. Grant all that which they had desired of Thee in their sojourn away from their homes. Reward them for all that they have sacrificed for us over the needs of their own children. O God, our enemies have taunted them for coming to us, but that did not deter them from seeking us in opposition to our enemies. Be merciful, O God, towards those faces which were discolored by the heat of the sun. Be merciful towards those cheeks which are pressed to the tomb of Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn and towards those eyes whose tears have run down in compassion for us. Have mercy, O God, for those hearts that have grieved for us. O God, into Thy hands I commend these bodies and souls until they shall be gathered at the pool (*al-ḥawḍ*) on the day of the great thirst.¹³⁷

To this goal, the happy reunion of the *imāms* and their followers at the source of life-giving water, we shall now turn.

At the Pool of al-Kawthar (*Alā-Hawḍ al-Kawthar*)¹

Suffering, whatever its nature may be, can lead to the annihilation, both physical and spiritual, of the sufferer. But we have argued that ultimate victory over evil, suffering and death, can be achieved only through suffering and death.² In fact, where redemption is the primary goal of the life of a religious community, it is accepted as a divine gift of eternal life granted through death. The Christian case is one of the most powerful examples of this phenomenon in human history. We would like to argue that this quest for salvation, in different forms to be sure, plays a major role in the religious life of the *Ithnā'asharī Shī'ī* community.

It will be our task in this chapter to emphasize this claim by showing, in a very direct way, how the sufferings of the Holy Family of Muḥammad are linked to the high status of its members on the Day of Judgment and the salvation of their devotees. We shall attempt to show further that while the Christian concept or concepts of redemption remain fully Christian and thus non-Islāmic and more specifically non-*Shī'ī* concepts, there is much that is common to the two religious traditions in this respect. Indeed, *Shī'ī* eschatology, while remaining within the Islāmic framework, resembles the eschatology of post-biblical Judaism and of the early Christian church. Although the concept of redemption in *Shī'ī* piety is always presented within the context of intercession (*shafā'ah*), in actual fact it goes beyond the accepted traditional Islāmic understanding of this concept. We shall keep our discussion within the context of intercession, indicating those elements in the *Shī'ī* concept of redemption which go beyond the limits of intercession.

We shall, in this chapter, investigate the intercessory prerogative of the Prophet and his descendants, the *imāms*. This divine favor is a direct reward for their endurance of suffering, privation and death. This favor will be manifested to the entire creation in the exalted station of the *imāms* before the throne of God. As they were here on

earth 'the weak ones (*al-mustad'afūn fī al-ard*)',³ so on the last day they will share in the sovereignty of God over His creation. We shall next discuss the symbol of this authority of the Prophet and his descendants: *ḥawḍ al-kawthar*, source of eternal life and relief from hardships on the Day of Resurrection.

It has been argued in this study that the faithful followers (*Shī'ah*) of the *imāms* share fully in their sufferings and sorrows. Consequently, they will share also in acts of redemption, healing and judgment. This prerogative of redemption and judgment will be granted by God to Fāṭimah, the mother of the sorrowful *imāms* and mistress of the House of Sorrows, and by her to the devotees of her descendants. Our next point of consideration, therefore, will be Fāṭimah's intercessory role on the Day of Judgment, effecting a final vindication for herself, her descendants and their followers.

Finally we shall see that absolute vengeance and fulfillment of all the spiritual and temporal hopes of the *Shī'ī* community are embodied in the twelfth *Imām*, the *Mahdī*. He shall come as the final executor of God's judgment and His proof over His creation. The *Mahdī*'s return (*raj'ah*) will be our final point of investigation.

6.1 INTERCESSION: THE REWARD OF SUFFERING

The *imāms*, as we have seen throughout this study, were from the beginning destined by God to drain the cup of suffering and martyrdom and to play a decisive role in human salvation and judgment. To a large extent, the intercessory prerogative of the *imāms* is dependent upon their patient endurance of privation, rejection and persecution. Indeed, *Shī'ī* piety has insisted, in many cases with little or no evidence, that all the *imāms* were martyred. In this way they all share directly in the martyrdom of Karbalā', in its sufferings as well as its rewards.

We saw in Chapter 2 that God offered the *walāyah* (spiritual and temporal authority) of the *imāms* to the entire creation as the primordial divine trust (*amānah*). He had already decreed, however, who among men would freely accept this divine trust and who would as freely reject it. By this decree humanity was marked, some for eternal

bliss and others for eternal torment. Thus we are told that the *imāms* possessed a special heavenly writ (*ṣahīfah*) containing the names both of their followers and their enemies until the Day of Resurrection.⁴

The problem of human freedom and divine sovereignty and will is as complex a theological issue in Islām as it is in Christianity. While both the broad emphasis and the more basic theological orientation are quite different in the two traditions, the *Shīʿī* view is closer to the Christian position than it is to the strict *Sunnī* Islāmic view. God wills, knows and decrees; yet man is still responsible for his choice, a choice which confronts him at every moment, as the earth would never be void of a proof or witness (*ḥujjah*) of God over His servants⁵ both to judge and to redeem them. The proximity of the *Shīʿī* view to that of Christianity is perhaps due to the fact that both accept a mediator between man and God, one whose essential being and place in human history plays a determining role in the divine plan for creation, revelation and salvation. Thus we must agree with Henri Corbin that *Shīʿī* imamology is a kind of 'Islāmic christology'.⁶ In Christian piety, Christ is the eternal Logos, the divine Word; the agent of creation on the one hand, and on the other hand the slain lamb standing before the throne of majesty both to save and to judge. The *imāms*, likewise, are at one and the same time the pivot of creation and reason for its subsistence, and the blood-stained martyrs whose death is a point of contention between God and their persecutors.⁷

The close connections between the sufferings of the Holy Family and the divine favor or intercession are presented in a tradition reporting a dialogue between God and the Prophet, on the night of the Prophet's heavenly journey (*miʿrāj*). The Prophet, we read, was told by God, 'Thy Lord wishes to try thee with three things to test thy patience.' The Prophet assented, praying for patience and endurance; the first trial was hunger and privation, as he was to give all that he possessed to the poor.⁸ The second trial was the persecution and calumnies which Muḥammad had to suffer at the hands of the hypocrites and the wounds inflicted upon him. The third trial was the persecution and wrong his family was destined to suffer after him. The details of this calamity have already been discussed in Chapter 1, when we considered those portions of the famous tradition of 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn, and others dealing with the insults, wrongs, and physical

violence which Fāṭimah suffered; violence which is said to have caused her to lose her child. We also observed the treachery, opposition and finally martyrdom which 'Alī suffered at the hands of his enemies. The heavenly voice described the death of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; to all this the Prophet assented, submitting his will to the divine decree as he repeated, 'To God do we belong and to Him we shall return.'⁹

It may be inferred that the persecutions and wrongs which the family of the Prophet Muḥammad had to suffer were due to the wickedness and folly of men. They were allowed by God to take place, however, in order to manifest the right over the wrong and thus establish His contention (*ḥujjah*) against evil men. An interesting point of comparison can be made with the biblical assertion that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that he and his people might deserve the punishment of the ten plagues.¹⁰

The death of Ḥusayn was especially decreed by God to consummate the divine plan, not only for human history here on earth, but also for the world to come. Thus the heavenly voice continued concerning Ḥusayn:

. . . he would beg for my assistance, but my decree had already predestined him and those with him for martyrdom. For his death shall be my contention [or argument (*ḥujjah*)] against the inhabitants of the earth.¹¹

The judgment of this divine contention will be executed by the ninth descendant of the martyred *Imām*, the *Mahdī*, one of whose epithets is *ḥujjat Allāh* (the proof, witness or contention of God).¹² The tradition goes on:

Then will I [God] bring out of his [Ḥusayn's] loins a male descendant whom I shall grant victory and vengeance for Ḥusayn. He shall fill the earth with justice and rule it with equity. Great fear will come over all men during his time. He shall kill so many, that people would doubt him [believing him an oppressor].¹³

We shall return to the role of the *Mahdī* later.

Trials and tribulations were decreed for the family of Muḥammad, but so was a promise of high rewards on the last day. 'Alī is to have the gardens of paradise for an inheritance. To him will be given control

over the *ḥawḍ al-kawthar*, to give its waters to his friends (*awliyā'*), to drink and to turn his enemies away thirsty. The fires of hell will be turned into 'coolness and peace' for him;¹⁴ he shall enter and release anyone in whose heart is the weight of an atom of love for *ahl-al-bayt*.

According to a very early tradition, reported even in *Shī'ī* sources on the authority of 'Abdallāh, son of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who heard it from his father, the Prophet said:

When the Day of Resurrection shall come, the throne of God will be adorned with every beautiful ornament. There will be brought two platforms of light, the length of each being 100 miles, and placed one on the right and the other on the left of the throne. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will be seated each on one of them, thus they will adorn the throne of God as would two earrings adorn the face of a woman.¹⁵

Moreover, as a reward for what the two *imāms* had suffered in this world, they will have favors beyond the imagination of the hearts of men. Again, we see the familiar contrast between the sad plight of the *imāms* here on earth and their exalted status with God in heaven. Yet, like Christ, who will display his wounds of suffering and death on the day of final reckoning, crowned with the crown of glory and power, so *Imām* Ḥusayn will still appear as a body without a head.¹⁶

The exalted status of the *imāms* in the world to come is always linked with the rewards promised to their followers for their own sufferings and endurance for the *imāms*' sake. This total vindication and exaltation of the *imāms* provides a sense of security and even exultation for the pious *Shī'īs*. More concretely still, it strengthens their hope for a blessed existence, as it promises restoration and healing after the period of struggle, persecution and the despair of failure.

If the twelfth *Imām* symbolizes for the *Shī'ī* community the temporal power, success and conquest which neither the *imāms* nor their followers have enjoyed in this world, 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first *Imām*, embodies spiritual hopes, or rather hopes belonging to the hereafter, hopes of vindication and the infinite pleasure of paradise. In the construction of traditions depicting the majesty and power of the Prince of the Faithful, pious imagination has displayed great eloquence and artistic fantasy. The magnetism of the personality of 'Alī has even attracted people from outside the *Shī'ī* community. Al-Khawārizmī

reports a tradition attributed to the Prophet which places 'Alī not far below the throne of God:

When the Day of Resurrection comes, 'Alī shall sit on al-Firdaws, which is a mountain higher than the entire paradise (*jannah*). On its top is the throne of light, and before him flowing the waters of Tasnīm.¹⁷ No one will be able to pass over the *ṣirāt*!¹⁸ except if he had accepted his authority (*walāyah*) and that of his descendants. 'Alī will then stand over the *ṣirāt* causing those who love him to enter paradise and those who hate him to be consigned to hell.¹⁹

This passage exemplifies a technique typical in *Shī'ī* tradition: obscure words which have come into the Arabic language, whether from oriental or ancient western languages, are concretized and used to convey an aspect of mystery and myth beyond their generally accepted meaning. Firdaws, for example, which means 'paradise', becomes a specific place in paradise with a special significance. This imaginative use of words at times is even applied to simple Arabic words. In most cases such a word would serve as the basis of a story conveying some special aspect of mystery, hagiography or some particular eschatological idea. The tradition we are about to consider displays all these elements, expressed in an interesting and romantic way.

'Alī and the Prophet are introduced as unknown people into the heavenly court on the Day of Judgment; they themselves appear as uninformed guests, so to speak, wondering at the things they see, and in turn evoking astonishment and admiration among angels and prophets. Like many traditions of this genre, the story ignores the publicly recognized and acclaimed presence of the two great personalities, Muḥammad and 'Alī, displayed in other traditions. Their absence, however, is only a dramatic device to introduce the Prophet and his beloved cousin and son-in-law, and to stress their glorious personalities. *Ḥadīth al-wasīlah*,²⁰ as this tradition is called, was related on the authority of the famous companion, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī. The Apostle of God said:

If you wish to invoke God, invoke Him through my *wasīlah*. He was asked, 'O Apostle of God what is the *wasīlah*?' And he answered, 'It is my station in paradise. It has a thousand steps, the

distance between each step would take a thoroughbred horse a month to gallop. . . . It will be made of every kind of precious stone. . . . It will be erected on the Day of Resurrection among the stations of the prophets shining like the resplendent moon among the stars. There will not be on that day a prophet, veracious man (*ṣiddīq*) or martyr, but that they would exclaim "Blessed is he whose station this is." Then will the proclamation proceed from the presence of God for all men and angels to hear: "This is the station of Muḥammad."'

The tradition goes on, with all the realism of an actual life situation, to describe the Prophet coming clad in new and shining garments with 'Alī before him. The latter will carry the standard of Muḥammad, the standard of exaltation (*ḥamd*) on which will be inscribed 'There is no God but God, those of good fortune (*al-muḥliḥūn*) will be rendered victorious by God.' The angels will gaze at them, thinking them to be two noble and highly favored prophets. Prophets will marvel, thinking them to be two archangels near the divine throne. Then Muḥammad will ascend to the top of that station, with 'Alī only a step below him. The divine voice will again announce, 'This is my beloved Muḥammad, and that is my friend (*walī*) 'Alī. Blessed are they who love him and woe to them who have hated and calumniated him.' Thus those who loved 'Alī in this world will rejoice and those who hated him will grieve. Riḍwān (the keeper of paradise) and Mālik (the keeper of hell) will come to the Prophet and deliver into his hands the keys of paradise and hell. The Prophet will give them to 'Alī, who will then permit whomsoever he wishes to enter paradise and whomsoever he wishes to enter the fire. In this mood of exultation, the tradition concludes, '. . . And hell shall be on that day more obedient to 'Alī than a young servant (*ghulām*) would be to his master.'²¹

The intercessory character of this tradition is obvious. It is, however, interesting to note the similarity in this tradition between 'Alī, the vicegerent and successor of Muḥammad, and Simon Peter, the prince of the apostles and keeper of the keys of the kingdom. In the *Shi'ī* doctrine of the imamate-succession, Saint Peter (*Sham'ūn al-ṣafā*) is declared to be a prophet.²² The equality of status between the Prophet Muḥammad and his vicegerent on the last day, however, goes

beyond the depiction of the relationship between Saint Peter and Christ on the Day of Judgment. In *ḥadīth al-wasilah*, as in other similar traditions, 'Alī is especially shown as not simply an intercessor, one who pleads with God on behalf of his followers, but further as a judge with all the divine powers of 'loosing and binding'.

While 'Alī shares in the sufferings and martyrdom of the *imāms*, and hence in their rewards of intercession on the last day, his authority rests more on his own special status as 'the brother'²³ and vicegerent (*waṣī*) of the Prophet. It is therefore more accurate to say that the other *imāms* and members of the Holy Family share in his great authority, because they share in the clear appointment of him and his descendants as the rightful leaders (*imāms*) of the community.

The community of devotees of the *imāms* will share as directly in their prerogatives of intercession as they do in their sufferings. More specifically, the community will share in the reward of redemption for suffering promised to the martyred *Imām* Ḥusayn. An early tradition clearly expresses this idea, reporting one of the many announcements given by the angels to the Prophet of his grandson's impending death. Umm Salamah, in whose house such angelic visits were supposed to have taken place, exclaimed as she heard the sad prediction, 'O Apostle of God ask God to spare him that [i.e., painful death].' He answered,

I did, but God revealed to me that he [Ḥusayn] shall have a high degree [in paradise] unattained by any other of God's creatures. He shall have a group of followers (*Shī'ah*) who will intercede and their intercession will be accepted. . . . Blessed are those who will be among the friends (*awliyā'*) of Ḥusayn and his followers (*Shī'ah*). By God they will be triumphant (*fa'izūn*) on the Day of Resurrection.²⁴

We saw in our discussion of the *zīyārah* of the covenant (*muṣāfaqah*) that the *imāms* are omnipresent, ready to hear the supplications of their devotees and to intercede with God on their behalf. They are, we are told, like the sun whose warm rays and brilliant light shines over the world giving it light and guidance. During their lives, the *imāms* may be likened to the sun in its full splendor, unveiled by clouds. After their death, regarded only as a period of occultation (*ghaybah*), they are like the sun shining through the clouds, a light hidden by a veil (*ḥijāb*). Yet the sun behind the clouds loses nothing of its power or brilliance; on

the contrary, it becomes more accessible to the weak sight of men whose eyes would burn out if they were to look at the naked sun.²⁵

The *imāms* know all the details of the lives of their followers. This is asserted in a tradition interpreting the Qur'ānic verse, 'Act, for God shall see your actions and His Apostle and the believers.'²⁶ A man asked the eighth *Imām*, al-Riḍā, to pray for him; the latter answered, 'How could I not do so when all your deeds are brought before me every day and night.' Then he repeated the above quoted verse in proof of his claim.²⁷ The seventh *Imām*, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, once declared, 'God became wrathful with the *Shi'ah*, so he made me choose between them or myself and I shielded them, by God, with my soul.'²⁸ This *ḥadīth* is included in the chapter of *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah* asserting the knowledge of the *imāms* of all events before they take place. The Arabic word *waqā* means 'to protect against something'; thus the *Imām* allowed the wrath of God to fall upon him rather than his followers. Unfortunately, this tradition alone clearly expresses an unequivocal idea of redemption; but the idea is, in our view, implied in much of the literature we have been considering in this chapter.

6.2 THE DAY OF THE GREAT THIRST

The pool of *al-kawthar* is a concrete symbol of the rewards and favors of the Holy Family and the final vindication of their sufferings: *ḥawḍ al-kawthar* is, therefore, the antithesis of the House of Sorrows. Its waters will wash away the blood and tears of the martyrs, not only of the Holy Family, but of all who died in the way of Truth or chose to be included in the House of Sorrows during their earthly sojourn. Before we examine the role of the Prophet and his son-in-law, the Prince of the Faithful, as the masters of this paradisaical spring, we shall cite at some length an interesting tradition which describes the pool in dramatic and vivid language.

Many of the traditions cited in the previous chapter connected with the pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn aimed at enticing the pious followers of the *imāms* by promising them unimagined pleasures in paradise as a reward for their effort. The tradition we are about to discuss also promises fantastic pleasures to those who perform the

holy pilgrimage or to those who may not be able to make the pilgrimage but still wish to do so in sad remembrance of the martyr of Karbalā'. In a long dialogue between the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Šādiq, and Masma', apparently a prominent man in the service of the 'Ab-bāsid authorities and a pious follower of the *Imām*, al-Šādiq asked if Masma' frequented the tomb of Ḥusayn. Masma' answered that he was a well-known man, so he feared the reprisals of the authorities. He did, however, remember the *Imām*'s martyrdom and grieved for him, so that his sorrow was clearly seen on his face. The *Imām* told him that his tears would be well rewarded on the Day of Resurrection, when he should see the *imāms* at the *ḥawḍ* and his joy would have no end. Like all things in creation, the *ḥawḍ* is not simply a spring of water, but a living personality with human feelings and human emotions. Thus the *Imām* first asserted that '... *al-kawthar* will rejoice at a person who loves us as he approaches it, that it would give him to taste of such great foods that he would wish never to leave it'.²⁹ Although the *ḥawḍ* is a spring of water, here we see it as a source of life-giving substance, of both food and drink. The *Imām* continued his vivid account by asserting that whosoever drinks from its waters will never thirst again for all eternity. Then describing the *ḥawḍ* itself, the *Imām* went on:

... In coolness, it is like camphor (*kāfūr*); its fragrance is that of musk and its taste is that of ginger (*zanjabīl*), sweeter than honey, softer than butter, and clearer than tears. ... It springs out of Tasnīm³⁰ and flows through the rivers of the gardens over a bed of rubies. It contains goblets as numerous as the stars of heaven. Its fragrance may be smelled from a distance of a thousand years' journey. Its goblets are of gold and silver and all kinds of precious stones. From it emanate so many sweet odors in the face of one drinking from it, that such a person would exclaim 'Would that I be left here forever, for I desire no substitute for this.'³¹

The *Imām* then reassured his friend that he would be among those who would drink from the *ḥawḍ*. The rest of the tradition describes 'Alī standing at the *ḥawḍ*, giving his friends to drink of its waters and turning his enemies away thirsty.

The doctrine of salvation through faith rather than works is a familiar one, both in Christianity and in other religious traditions. In

Christianity, the insistence of St. Paul on this idea and, centuries later, of Martin Luther, are cases in point. With even greater popular pietistic fervor, the same idea was expressed in Japanese Buddhism in the Nambutsu formula of faith in the Amida Buddha.³² Islām for the most part places an equal emphasis on works and faith. Faith (*imān*), in the view of many Muslim theologians, is both an acceptance of the heart and an action of the limbs.³³ *Shīʿī* piety shifted the emphasis greatly to the side of the heart's acceptance.

Many of the traditions under consideration likewise equate love for the Holy Family with faith in God and hatred towards unbelief (*kufr*).³⁴ Acceptance of the *walāyah* of the *imāms* is part of faith in the divine oneness, and rejection of it is as grave a sin as associating other gods with Allāh. All other sins may be forgiven through the intercession of the *imāms*; in fact, the *imāms*, and Ḥusayn in particular, are the intercessors for all sinners in the Muslim community who accept their *walāyah* and share their sufferings.

In a tradition³⁵ describing the events of the Day of Judgment, the entire human race will be brought together for the final reckoning. Men will stand barefoot and naked under the burning sun of the desert at the gathering place (*maḥshar*). They will remain standing until their sweat will flow in streams, unable to breathe from fatigue and thirst. Finally, a voice will call out from the divine throne, 'Where is the prophet of the gentiles, or unlettered prophet (*al-nabī al-ummī*)! . . . Where is the prophet of mercy, Muḥammad, son of 'Abdallāh!' The Prophet will come forward, preceding all, until he stands at the *ḥawḍ* whose length equals the distance between Yemen and Damascus. 'Alī will also be summoned to stand with the Prophet at that great *ḥawḍ*. All men will pass before him and will be given to drink and many will be turned away.

The fifth *Imām* went on to say that when the Prophet sees that among those turned away from the *ḥawḍ* are some who love *ahl al-bayt*, he will weep and exclaim, 'O Lord, the *Shīʿah* of 'Alī, the *Shīʿah* of 'Alī'. God will then send an angel to ask why he was weeping and the Prophet will reply:

'How could I not weep when I see men of the *Shīʿah* of my brother 'Alī, son of Abī Ṭālib, turned away towards the people of the fire

and prevented from drinking of my *ḥawḍ!*' Then God would say to him 'O Muḥammad, I have given them to thee and have forgiven all their sins. They shall be with thee and with those whose authority (*walāyah*) they have accepted. They shall inherit thy *ḥawḍ*, for I have accepted thy intercession for them and have favored them for thy sake.'³⁶

In this tradition, we see the Prophet interceding for the sinners of the community (*Shī'ah*) of 'Alī. Many traditions, however, depict 'Alī playing not simply the role of intercessor, but also that of a harsh judge. In such traditions we can discern all the bitterness, revengeful hatred and frustration of which a persecuted community is capable. This sublimation of political frustration and failure has found its perfect embodiment in the True Prince of the Faithful, 'Alī, son of Abī Ṭālib. In him the community has found its ideal of power and political excellence and all the virtues of a hero. We shall end this section with an account of the Prince of the Faithful at the paradisaical *ḥawḍ*, driving his enemies away with the rod of absolute authority and vengeance.

More than most other traditions of its genre, the dialogue of the sixth *Imām*, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ṣādiq, with Masma' displays gloating pleasure at the punishment, torment and remorse which the enemies of the Holy Family are to suffer in the world to come. The closest parallel to this tradition in the Christian scriptures is the gory images presented by the writer of the Apocalypse of John. In fact, a comparison between the traditions we are investigating and the Book of Revelations would be highly instructive.

It seems that whatever the essential message of a religious tradition may be, the community living by this message must find a way to strengthen the hope and confidence necessary for its members to endure the hardships and persecutions of a small religio-political minority. The community, therefore, finds its ultimate consolation not only in the rewards of bliss for its persecution but also in the eternal damnation of its persecutors. As the events of both the Apocalypse of John and the eschatological traditions attributed to the twelver *Shī'ī imāms* are supposed to take place outside the present existence, when neither remorse nor repentance shall avail, judgment and salvation go hand in hand. This characteristic exultation in both

the merciless judgment of God and the tender, sentimental exuberance of the faithful in the bliss to come seems to be common to the apocalyptic literature of the Judaeo-Christian-Islāmic tradition. We shall have a little more to say on this point before the close of this discussion.

The long and graphic description of *ḥawḍ al-kawthar* aims at kindling the longing of the faithful for the great bliss awaiting them as well as their zeal for the cause of the martyred *Imām* Ḥusayn and his persecuted descendants. The sixth *Imām*, therefore, asserts that all eyes that shed tears for the Holy Family would be blessed with the sight of *al-kawthar*; and that the greater the love a devotee would show for *ahl al-bayt*, the greater and more intense would be his pleasure at the *ḥawḍ*. Finally, at some length, the *Imām* describes his worthy forebear, 'Alī, exercising control over the great *ḥawḍ*:

At *al-kawthar* shall stand the Prince of the Faithful with a stick of thorns (*awsaj*) in his hand with which he would destroy our enemies. Then the enemy will plead, saying, 'But I do profess the two *shahādas*'; 'Alī will answer, 'Go to your *Imām fulān* [omitting the name, but intending Abū Bakr or 'Umar] and ask him to intercede for you.' The man will reply, 'My *Imām* whom you mention has disowned (*tabarra'a*) me.' But 'Alī will reply, 'Turn back and ask him whom you have accepted as your master (*walī*) and preferred him over all other creatures; if he is indeed the best of men, ask him to intercede for you; for the best of men is he who can intercede.' The man will plead, 'I am perishing of thirst!' But 'Alī will retort, 'May God increase your thirst and never quench it.'³⁷

Just as the *imāms* were killed here on earth in cold blood, so will they have the pleasure of meting out the punishment of the sword to their enemies in manifold measure. We shall, in the remaining pages of this study, follow the final scenes of this drama to its consummation before the divine throne. We shall briefly investigate the place of the faithful devotees of the *imāms* in the redemptive drama of martyrdom, Fāṭimah's role in that drama, and, finally, the consummation of the entire mission of the *imāms*, and with it that of the history of creation, in the return of the *Mahdī*, the great avenger, the man of the sword.

6.3 THE FAITHFUL REMNANT³⁸

We have often stressed in this study the identity of substance, destiny and final beatification of the *imāms* and their followers. The community, inasmuch as it has shared in the suffering of the Holy Family here on earth, will share in the great rewards and gift of intercession of the Prophet and the people of his household (*aḥl al-bayt*) on the last day. Moreover, the oppressors of the elect community of God and His Apostle will share the same terrible fate as those who stained their hands with the sacred blood of Ḥusayn and many of his descendants.³⁹

The tradition attributed to ‘Alī, son of Ḥusayn, to which we have repeatedly referred in this study, graphically describes the rewards of faithful pilgrims to the sacred shrine of Karbalā’. An untold number of angels will receive them at the sacred tomb and beseech God to forgive all their sins.

. . . They shall engrave on their faces with the stylus (*maysam*) of the throne of God, ‘This is the pilgrim to the grave of the best of martyrs and son of the best of prophets.’⁴⁰

On the Day of Judgment, a dazzling light shall shine in the pilgrims’ faces, and by this light they will be recognized. Then the Prophet and ‘Alī, with Gabriel and Michael, will gather these people together, save them from the fears of hell and bring them into the gardens of paradise.

We examined in Chapter 4 above a curious tradition reported on the authority of the sixth *Imām* which contradicts the very fact of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. It describes him sitting on a throne of precious stones on the mount of Raḍwah, near Mecca, in the company of all the ancient prophets waiting for the coming of the *Mahdī*.⁴¹ This tradition may have been based on an earlier and equally fantastic account of the great favors given to the followers of the *imāms* as they shall sit around *Imām* Ḥusayn in great pomp and splendor. This latter account has no time reference, but the Day of Resurrection may be intended. It is noteworthy that both traditions are attributed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq and reported on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī. Al-Mufaḍḍal has been a highly controversial figure among the disciples of the sixth *Imām*, some people branding him as an extremist deviate, a

follower of Abu al-Khaṭṭāb, a notorious disciple, and others praising him for his piety and trustworthiness.⁴²

The following tradition declares that the pilgrims to the shrine of Karbalā' are served by angels and fed on the food of paradise. Then, as an afterthought, in response to the astonishment of al-Mufaddal, the sixth *Imām* exclaimed, 'Shall I tell you more?' He then went on,

I could see a couch of light over which is set up a dome or canopy (*qubbah*) of red rubies and adorned with precious stones. I could see Ḥusayn reclining on that couch and around him are set up ninety thousand green canopies. I could see the believers flocking to him and greeting him. God, be He exalted, would then address them, saying, 'Ask me my friends (*awliyā*); for long you were done harm, humiliated and persecuted. Behold, today you would not ask me for a need you may have in this world or the world to come, but that I would grant it.' . . . They shall then eat and drink in paradise. This, by God, is the great favor (*karāmah*) of which there will be no end.⁴³

We noted earlier in our discussion of the *ziyārah* ritual that through the *imāms* God causes the rain to fall, the earth to bring forth its fruits and all evil and wrong to be alleviated. The place of the devotees in the maintenance and preservation of the universal order of things is asserted in many traditions attributed to the Prophet and the *imāms*. In a tradition attributed to the Prophet, he foretells the death of Ḥusayn at the hands of evil and corrupt men in a brief dialogue with Fāṭimah. Of the devotees of the *imāms* he speaks as follows:

Then will come to bury Ḥusayn and his companions men who love us, whose knowledge of God and zeal to uphold our rights is unequalled among men. They alone among men shall turn to us. They are the lamps in the darkness of wrongdoing, and they are the true intercessors. They shall meet me at my *ḥawḍ* on the last day, and I shall recognize them by their names. . . . They are the support (*qiwām*) of the earth and through them [i.e., their *barakah*] the rain comes from heaven. . . .⁴⁴

These few elect of the Muslim community, and indeed of humanity, occupy the place of intermediaries between God and the *imāms* and the rest of mankind. They are the righteous sufferers through whose favor

God's mercy is manifested. It may be observed that this phenomenon of the elect community, the friends (*awliyā'*) of God and His true servants, is a familiar one in the spiritual history of humanity. We need only to mention the holy nation of ancient Israel, the Buddhist *sangha* or order of the elect, and the Christian church as the communion of saints, the sacred body of the crucified savior. In these and other cases, we can discern an analogous role to that claimed by the *imāms* for their community (*Shī'ah*) of the faithful. These elect are the sign of divine love and providence; they are the standard by which the state of corruption or goodness of society can be judged. In the eschatological consummation of human history, they alone will be the witnesses to the truth and its preservers. As a reward for their suffering and steadfastness, 'they shall inherit the earth'.⁴⁵ They are the redeemed community, and, in a way, through their participation in the sufferings and favors of the *imāms*, they will play a decisive role in the final consummation of history, the 'salvation-history' (*Heilsgeschichte*) of humanity, a role, in the view of *Shī'ī* piety, both concrete and violent. This holy remnant will make up the human part of the victorious forces of the *Mahdī*. We shall return at some length to the *Mahdī* and his supporters, but first we must briefly consider the important role of the sorrowful mother of the *imāms*, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'.

6.4 FĀṬIMAH: THE MISTRESS OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

In sharp contrast to the violence characterizing the long drama of suffering and revenge with which we are concerned stands Fāṭimah, the sorrowful mother who endured all her sufferings patiently. Her only weapon was and still is her tears, which here on earth were a source of grief and embarrassment to the people of Medina and in paradise continue to be a flaming fire kindling the grief and anger of the celestial hosts and the wrath of God himself. God, we are told, is wrathful when Fāṭimah is angry and pleased when she is happy.⁴⁶

It was observed above (Chapter 2, in our discussion of the exegesis of the 'light verse' attributed to the sixth *Imām*) that Fāṭimah shares with the *imāms* not only their sufferings but also their high status with God. Her name, like those of her father, husband and two sons, is

derived from a divine name or attribute. Thus on the leg of the throne is written the name of God 'Fāṭir' (Creator), and beside it the name 'Fāṭimah' as the earthly symbol of the divine creative power. The Prophet called his daughter Fāṭimah (the weaned one) because God had spared her,⁴⁷ her progeny and those who love them from the fire.

Fāṭimah's humiliation will be amply rewarded. The poverty and privation which she endured in life will be matched with unimaginable glory. All creatures, men, angels and *jinn*, will be dazzled by her radiant light as she stands before God to pass judgment on her persecutors and grant intercession to those who love *ahl al-bayt*. The mistress of the House of Sorrows will be the mistress of the Day of Judgment.

In a prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth nabawī*) related on the authority of the famous *ḥadīth* transmitter, Abū Hurayrah, we have a vivid description of Fāṭimah's royal entry into the divine presence:

When the Day of Resurrection shall come, and all creatures will stand before God for judgment, a voice from behind the veil (*ḥijāb*) shall announce, 'O men turn down your gaze and bow down your heads, for Fāṭimah, the daughter of Muḥammad, is about to traverse the *ṣirāt*.'⁴⁸

Fāṭimah will pass over the bridge of separation on a she-camel of light with a crown adorned with jewels on her head. On her right and left, she will be surrounded by multitudes of angels and will advance until she is on the same level as the throne of God. She will dismount and stand before God with the blood-stained shirt of her martyred son Ḥusayn in her hand and say:

. . . O Lord, judge Thou between me, and those who had wronged me. Judge between me and those who killed my child.

A voice from the divine throne will answer, 'O my beloved and daughter of my beloved, ask me and thou shalt be given, intercede with me for thine intercession will be accepted.'⁴⁹

Fāṭimah will seek divine retribution for the wrongs she and her martyred son suffered. While *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī* views differ regarding her own sufferings and the cause of her death, they concur on her deep sorrow for the death of her son and her right to seek vengeance from

God on the last day upon those who committed such a crime against God and His Apostle.⁵⁰ Fāṭimah will therefore stand before God, either with the blood-stained shirt of Ḥusayn or with the *Imām* himself, a body without a head.

In a tradition attributed to the fifth *Imām*, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, we are told that:

On the Day of Resurrection, Fāṭimah will stand at the gate of hell, and on the forehead of every man will be written 'mu'min' [believer] or 'kāfir' [unbeliever]. A lover (*muḥibb*) [of the Holy Family] whose sins were too numerous would be ordered to the fire. Fāṭimah would read between his eyes the word 'lover,' and so she would say, 'O my Lord and Master, Thou hast called me Fāṭimah and protected me (*faṭamtanī*) and those who accept my *walāyah* and that of my descendants, from the fire, for Thy promise is true and Thou wouldst not revoke Thy promise.'

God would repeat her words in confirmation and continue,

. . . But I ordered the servant of mine to the fire so that thou mayest intercede with me on his behalf and I would accept thine intercession for him, in order to manifest to my angels, prophets and apostles and the people of the gathering (*mawqif*) thy status with me. Thus whosoever thou readest between his eyes 'believer,' take him by the hand and lead him to paradise.⁵¹

This tradition provides one of the clearest expressions of the concept of redemption in *Shī'ī* piety. Intercession is generally understood in Islām as necessary for those who have led a good life but whose balance of good and evil deeds inclines more to the side of evil than to the side of good. Both the intercession of the prophets and the friends (*awlīyā'*) of God, coupled with divine mercy, may benefit the transgressing believer. Fāṭimah's role, as depicted in the tradition we have just cited, is more than that of an intercessor. She is given the authority to counteract the divine judgment. She does not intercede on the behalf of a believer that his punishment may be lightened, but rather saves a sinner from the torment of hell altogether. Of special interest in this tradition is the conscious identification of the love for *ahl al-bayt* with faith. Thus God is made to say, 'Whosoever thou

readest between his eyes “*mu'min*” . . .’ instead of the earlier inscription ‘*muḥibb*’.

We have already discussed in this chapter the divine decree of suffering and persecution for the family of Muḥammad, and the reward each of its members will have on the Day of Judgment. Fāṭimah will be highly recompensed for her many sufferings and humiliations. Thus God addressed the Prophet on the night of his heavenly journey,

As for thy daughter, I shall make her stand near my throne where she will be told, ‘Behold, God hath given thee power over His creatures. Whosoever hath wronged thee and thy children, thou mayest judge them as thou wishest; for God will accept thy verdict concerning them.’⁵²

All the gathered multitudes of men and angels will witness as those who wronged her are brought forth and she orders them to the fire. The wrongdoers will be filled with remorse for their crimes against God and the people of the household of His Apostle, for rejecting their *walāyah* and taking other men as their masters (*awliyā'*).

As Fāṭimah was the first to suffer wrong after the Prophet, her final vindication will bring the drama of sorrows and sufferings of *ahl al-bayt* to a close. Her vindication, moreover, will include the vindication of her husband and their descendants. The Prophet is supposed to have described this final episode of the drama thus: On the Day of Resurrection his daughter will be told to enter paradise, but she will refuse, saying, “I will not enter until I know what was done to my son [Ḥusayn] after me.” Fāṭimah will then see her martyred son, a body without a head, contending with his murderers. Horrified by this sight, she will utter a loud cry to which the Prophet, earlier prophets and angels will respond with similar cries of grief and horror. At this, God himself will flame with wrath for her and will order the kindling of a fire, called *Habhab*, which has burned for a thousand years. Into this black furnace the murderers of Ḥusayn and ‘bearers of the Qur’ān’ (that is, the people who fought against ‘Alī in the Battle of Siffin) will be consigned.⁵³

In a different version of this tradition, Ḥusayn is transformed, before Fāṭimah’s eyes, into the best of forms. His murderers and all

those who shared in taking his blood will be brought together for the final retribution. They will be killed and resuscitated until each of the *imāms* has killed them once. The sixth *Imām* concludes, ‘. . . Then will all anger be appeased and all sorrow forgotten.’⁵⁴ The final episode of revenge just discussed must be preceded by a universal period of restoration here on earth where the *Mahdī*, the twelfth *Imām*, will be given universal authority. We shall, therefore, end this chapter with an investigation of his mission, which will usher in the consummation of human history.

6.5 AL-MAHDĪ, THE FINAL AVENGER

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, everyone who pierced him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.⁵⁵

The long history of the *imāms* began before time and creation. They were, according to *Shī‘ī* piety, supposed to have existed with God as His primordial Word and Spirit. ‘Alī, the first *Imām*, in a long sermon reported on the authority of his great grandson, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, said:

God, exalted be He, is One (*aḥad wāḥid*) unique in His unity. He uttered a word which became a light. From that light He created Muḥammad and created me and my progeny. Then God uttered another word which became a spirit, which He made to dwell in that light and the light He made to dwell in our bodies. Thus we are the spirit of God and His words.⁵⁶

The tradition goes on to assert that the *imāms* were hidden in a green cloud (*ẓillah khadra*), praising and magnifying God before there was sun or moon, day or night. The *imāms*, therefore, are the true divine Logos which preceded all creation; through them, and for their sake, all things were made.

The *imāms* collectively are like Christ for the *Shī‘ī* community. Each

of them, moreover, embodies one or several aspects of this quasi-Christological personality. On earth, Ḥusayn was the embodiment of the betrayed and suffering martyr, mirroring Christ in his sufferings. The twelfth *Imām*, the *Mahdī*, on the other hand, mirrors in his personality and mission the judging and victorious Christ, the Christ who is to come on the clouds of heaven, whose return the community still awaits with anxious anticipation. The time of his concealment (*ghaybah*) is a time of travail, a period of disintegration which must precede the final restoration. Finally, like the second coming of Christ, his reappearance or return (*raj'ah*) will be a time of fear and remorse, of going astray and general chaos. All this, however, will be followed by a long period of peace, prosperity, and the final triumph of truth over falsehood when justice and equity will reign forever. Thus it is related that the Prophet said,

If there will remain of this world one day, God will prolong that day until a male descendant of mine, whose name shall be my name and patronym (*kunyah*) will be my *kunyah*. He shall fill the earth with equity and justice as it has been filled with inequity and wrongdoing.⁵⁷

The literature dealing with the *Mahdī*, his birth, concealment and return, is vast and complex. A critical discussion of even a fraction of it is beyond the scope of this study.⁵⁸ We shall therefore discuss only a few selected traditions to reconstruct a sequential history of the *Imām*. The personality of the hidden *Imām* has provided *Shī'ī* piety with rich soil for the most fantastic hagiographical imagination. Indeed, some of the traditions, especially those dealing with his return, have been a source of embarrassment for *Shī'ī* 'ulamā' and traditionists. For our purposes, however, such traditions do reflect *Shī'ī* piety, its hopes, disappointments and visions of a better existence; so we shall not overly concern ourselves with the question of authenticity and the theological acceptability of these traditions. We do not, however, wish to imply that all of them represent official *Shī'ī* beliefs. We shall indicate when necessary strong objections to or approvals of some of the traditions, and the men on whose authority they were transmitted.

It has already been stressed that the *imāms* of the *Ithnā'asharī Shī'ī*

community stand at the end of a long line of prophets and vicegerents. Even the number twelve is taken to be normative, the number of vicegerents (*awṣiyyā'*) of every major prophet. Furthermore, each prophet and his chief vicegerent had a period of concealment, a period of trial for their community and a cause for the establishment of divine judgment against his opponents.⁵⁹ Another reason for the concealment of other prophets and vicegerents was the threat to their lives from evil rulers. The coming of the *Mahdī* at the end of human history will be the fulfillment of the mission of all the prophets before him and the time of their final vindication.

The last prophet, Muḥammad, and the *imāms* after him, announced the coming of the *Mahdī*; traditions related from the *imāms* display an air of impatient expectancy on the part of the community. Al-Kulaynī relates that 'Abd al-Malik Ibn A'iyun, a disciple of the fifth *Imām*, said, 'I rose to leave the *Imām* Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir] supporting myself with my arm, and I wept'. The *Imām* asked what made him weep and 'Abd al-Malik answered, 'I had hoped to see that great event [i.e., the coming of the *Mahdī*] while I still had strength in me.' The *Imām* retorted angrily, 'Are you [i.e., his followers] not satisfied that your enemies kill one another while you sit safely in your homes? For when that event shall come, each man among you will be given the strength of forty men. . . . You would be the foundations of the earth and its treasurers.'⁶⁰

This dialogue depicts well the situation during the period of the *imāms* between the death of Ḥusayn and the beginning of the concealment of the twelfth *Imām*. There is no doubt, in our view, that both the *imāms* and their followers expected a victorious future *imām* who would succeed where Ḥusayn had failed and who would attain power for himself and his community. Such expectations could be very dangerous, and thus the *imāms* had to keep this hope alive without kindling the zeal of their followers into an armed revolt. They therefore constructed an increasingly complex metaphysical and theological cult of the *Mahdī*. His birth, occultation and return were beyond the knowledge of any man and it was even unlawful for the *imāms'* followers to speculate about such things. Not even his name was to be mentioned; men were to refer to him only by his many titles and epithets, such as: *al-Qā'im* (the rising one), *Ḥujjat al-Muḥammad*

(the proof of the family of Muḥammad), *Sāhib al-Zamān* (master of the age), and, of course, the *Mahdī*.⁶¹

Like the *imāms* before him, the twelfth *Imām* is said to have had a miraculous birth. He was born on the eighth day of Sha‘bān in the year 255 of the *hijrah*⁶² (869 A.D.). He came out of his mother’s womb prostrate in the attitude of prayer, pure and circumcised, raising his voice in the profession of faith (*shahādah*). His father took him in his arms, passed his hands over his mouth, eyes and ears and said, ‘Speak, O my son.’ The *Imām* recounted the names of all the *imāms* from ‘Alī to himself and prayed that the relief (*faraj*) of the community be at his hands.⁶³ The infant grew up miraculously so that by the time his father died, less than five years later, he had reached manhood and was of age to bear the burden of the *imāmah*. His infancy is reminiscent of that of Moses and Jesus. Like them, his birth was kept secret except from the few elect. Forty days after his birth, like Moses in *Shī‘ī* tradition,⁶⁴ he was taken away and cared for by angels, returning only for brief visits at intervals of forty days. When a great aunt asked to see the blessed infant one day, his father replied, ‘O aunt, we have committed him to the care of Him in whose charge the mother of Moses put her child.’⁶⁵

In most early traditions the disappearance of the infant was supposed to have been caused by the wide search conducted by the ‘Abbāsīd authorities for any male child of the eleventh *Imām*. The plan was to kill such an infant if found, and thus break the line of the imamate succession.⁶⁶ Perhaps this fear is hinted at in the tradition which asserts that the young mother of the twelfth *Imām* showed no signs of pregnancy while carrying him.⁶⁷ The mother of the *Imām* was a Christian slave girl captured during a Muslim expedition against Byzantine territory. This unknown war captive has been given an exalted place in the universal history of prophetic succession. Narjis, as the girl was called, was made to be a granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor. Long before her captivity, she was visited by Fāṭimah, the venerable ancestress of the *imāms*, who instructed her in the principles of Islām and prepared her for the great role she was to play. Finally, the prophets Jesus and Muḥammad with their vicegerents Simon Peter (Sham‘ūn) and ‘Alī appeared to the girl. Muḥammad asked for her hand from Jesus, and ‘Alī and Simon Peter acted as witnesses to the marriage contract. Fāṭimah and the Virgin Mary also came to bless the

sacred marriage. From that time on the eleventh *Imām*, Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the girl’s future spouse, came to see her every night in a dream. He finally ordered her to flee her country and allow herself to be sold into slavery.

In this way the twelfth *Imām*’s lineage combined both royalty and prophecy. More important still is the direct inclusion of Christianity in the popular concept and mythic history of the *imāms* in *Ithnā‘asharī Shī‘ism*. The connection of the hidden *Imām* with the earlier prophets, their revelations and communities, is an integral part of the *Shī‘ī* doctrine of the *imām*. In popular piety, as we shall see later, this connection becomes an identification of the *Mahdī* with all the prophets before him.

It has been observed that every prophet had a period of concealment (*ghaybah*). Thus the *ghaybah* of the *Mahdī* is a continuation of the ancient practices (*sunan*) of the prophets. The sixth *Imām* told one of his disciples, Sudayr, ‘Our *Qā‘im* will have a long concealment (*ghaybah*).’ Sudayr asked the reason for this and the *Imām* continued, ‘It is because God would have the ways (*sunan*) of the earlier prophets [i.e., their concealments] continued in him. It will be necessary for him . . . to equal all the periods of their concealments.’⁶⁸ The concealment of the *Mahdī*, like the concealments of earlier prophets and vicegerents, was decreed by God who alone knows the wisdom behind His own decrees.

The *Mahdī* had two periods of concealment: one during which he communicated with the community through special representatives, and a longer or greater concealment which will continue until he returns at the end of the world. Men living during the period of his greater occultation should not ask questions but only pray for his return. Al-Kulaynī, the famous *Shī‘ī* traditionist, wondered about the *Imām*’s concealment, its length and the wisdom behind it. The answer came to him through the *Imām*’s second representative (*wakīl*), Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Umarī:

As for the reason for the *ghaybah*, God says, ‘O believers, question not concerning things, which if they were revealed to you, would vex you.’⁶⁹

For there were none of my fathers but that there was in his neck an

allegiance (*fī 'unuqīhi bay'ah*) to one of the tyrants (*tawāghīt*) of his time. I shall return when I return, and there is for no evil ruler a *bay'ah* in my neck. As for the benefits that can accrue from me during my *ghaybah*, they are like those of the sun when clouds hide it from the sight of men. I am the safety for the inhabitants of the earth as the stars are for the inhabitants of heaven.⁷⁰

The *Imām* counselled his followers not to inquire about things which do not concern them, but to pray instead for God to hasten their relief.

More than any of the *imāms* before him, the twelfth *Imām* embodied the fears, disappointments and final fulfillment of all the hopes and aspirations of the *Shī'ī* community. In the tradition just cited, all the *imāms* before him had to give tacit approval under duress to the unlawful authority of the rulers of their time. The *Mahdī* will be free of this sanction of usurpation, always unlawful, since the *imām* alone has the right to be the head of the community.⁷¹ The reason for his lesser concealment, attributed to the Prophet himself, is that he was afraid of being killed.⁷² Moreover, the *imāms* before him were often betrayed by their own followers, as was the case with both Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Thus when the *Mahdī* comes, there will be no one guilty of such a heinous crime against the true representative of God and His Apostle. Rather, those who accept his *walāyah* during his absence, and are not swayed by hardships, doubts and persecutions, will be greatly rewarded for their patience and steadfastness.

It is clear in many of the early traditions that people expected the return of the *Mahdī* during the reign of the 'Abbāsids. This expectation grew in intensity as the power of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate weakened and revolts sprang up throughout the Muslim world. As this hope was not realized, the emphasis began to shift to an indefinite future. The time of the return of the *Mahdī* was declared to be a secret guarded by God, known only to Him. The expectant followers of the *imāms*, who wished to be among those destined to make up the great and victorious armies of *al-Qā'im*, were told that their patient wish to be so honored would earn them the same merit as if they had fought and died with him. Thus the fourth *Imām*, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, was supposed to have declared to one of his disciples, Abū Khālid al-

Kābilī, that the *ghaybah* of the twelfth vicegerent of the Apostle of God would be a long one. He continued:

. . . The people of the period of his *ghaybah*, who profess his imamate and wait for his appearance, are better than the people of any other age. For God shall give them such knowledge and understanding wherewith the *ghaybah* for them would be like vision or presence (*mushāhadah*). They shall be considered by God as though they had fought alongside the Apostle of God with the sword. They are truly our faithful followers (*Shī'ah*) and the enjoiners to the religion of God openly and in secret.⁷³

A tradition relating a long sermon of 'Alī, the first *Imām*, further asserts that any believer who dies a natural death before the coming of the *Mahdī* will be resurrected in order to be martyred with him and will thus attain the merit of dying in the way of God. Anyone, on the other hand, who is killed will also be resurrected in order to enjoy the peace and security of the *Mahdī*'s reign and die a natural death after a very long life.⁷⁴

The return of the *Mahdī* will be preceded by a long period of chaos and degeneration, to continue with increasing intensity until evil, falsehood and wickedness dominate the earth. The disintegration is to be complete and universal. There will be total disorder: political unrest, immorality, falsehood and a total disregard for the principles of religion. Nature will manifest similar signs of disorder and chaos. The final stages of this total disintegration will be the sign, for the small and faithful remnant, of the coming of the *Mahdī*, who will usher in a new era of restoration. These manifestations of universal disintegration will be the signs of the *Mahdī*'s return (*raj'ah*), since he was to come after the final collapse of 'Abbāsīd rule. Such predictions must have been made either at the time of these events or shortly afterwards, in retrospect.⁷⁵

Another strange but telling sign is to be the appearance of al-Sufyānī 'Uthmān Ibn 'Andasah, a descendant of Yazīd, at the head of a large army from Damascus. After wreaking death and destruction in the land, the army will proceed towards Mecca and Medina to destroy them and defeat the *Mahdī*. But God will cause the earth to open up and swallow the entire army while still in the desert. This prophecy

reflects well the events which were supposed to have taken place during the last year of Yazīd's short reign.⁷⁶

These political events will be only part of the general disorder in the world. A man asked the fifth *Imām*, al-Bāqir, about the signs of the coming of the *Mahdī*; the *Imām* answered:

It will be when women will be like men and men like women; when men would be satisfied with men and women with women; and when females would ride astride saddled horses. It will be also when false testimonies will be accepted and true testimonies rejected; when men would take the blood of other men lightly, commit fornication and devour the money of the poor in usury.⁷⁷

In those days, moreover, religion will be just a name on the lips of people and the Qur'ān will become dead words on paper with no meaning or influence in the lives of men and women. There will appear sixty false men claiming to be prophets.⁷⁸ Then will appear the anti-Christ (*al-Dajjāl*) and he will mislead people with great signs and miracles.⁷⁹ Many will go astray and only the few elect of God will be steadfast in the faith.

These traditions are but a continuation of the long history of the apocalyptic vision of humanity. They remind us of the apocalyptic warnings of Christ that, before his second coming, many false messiahs will appear. Fathers will betray their sons and sons their fathers, and nations will rise up against other nations. When these and many other terrible signs appear, 'The coming of the son of man [the true messiah] will be at hand.'⁸⁰ Similarly, when all justice, truthfulness and goodness disappear from the earth, then God will rescue His creation and restore harmony and order forever.

This general chaos will be manifested in nature as well. The earth shall withhold its fruits and the heavens their rain; the sun will rise in the west and set in the east, and there will be earthquakes in the east and the west.⁸¹

In Islām, as in Christianity and other religious traditions, this apocalyptic vision of the last days is an essential part of the redemptive history of humanity.⁸² *Al-Qā'im*, for the *Ithnā'asharī Shī'ī* Muslims, will come to complete the task of Ḥusayn, the great martyr of Karbalā'. Hence he shall appear, according to many traditions, on the day

of 'Āshūrā', 'the day on which Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī, was killed'.⁸³ He shall appear first in Mecca, the holiest city of Islām, but will make his headquarters in Kūfah. There, where 'Alī was killed and buried, and nearby Karbalā', the sacred shrine of Ḥusayn, the *Mahdī* will have his seat of judgment.

Like Christ and other saviors, the *Mahdī* will save humanity and the entire creation from degeneration. Al-Mufīd, perhaps reflecting earlier ideas of the *Mahdī*'s mission, asserts that *al-Qā'im* will reign for a period of seven years, each year equaling ten of our years. Thus, after a reign of 70 years, the *Mahdī* will die and forty days later the resurrection will come.⁸⁴ This final period is the time of the end, when the earth will be without an *imām* and no repentance will be accepted.

Although according to this tradition, the *Mahdī* will fulfill his mission and usher in the resurrection, *Shī'ī* piety could not accept an eschatology which did not include the Prophet, 'Alī, and his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In particular, the return (*karrah*) of Ḥusayn to revenge his own blood was promised very early. Perhaps one of the earliest references appears in a tradition reporting an exegesis by the sixth *Imām* of the following Qur'ānic verse: 'And mention in the Book Ishmael; he was true to his promise, and he was a Messenger, a Prophet.'⁸⁵ The *Imām* commented, 'This was not the son of Abraham, but rather Ismā'īl, son of Ḥazqīl.'⁸⁶ This otherwise unknown prophet was supposed to have been tortured by his people, who flayed the skin of his head and face and left him to suffer a slow and painful death. God sent to him the angel of torment who was commanded to obey the Prophet's orders in punishing these cruel people. But the prophet declined this divine offer of immediate revenge and prayed instead, 'O my Lord . . . Thou hast promised Ḥusayn to return him to this world to avenge himself on those who killed him. My wish is that Thou wouldst return me with Ḥusayn to this world so that I may also avenge myself on those who did this to me.'⁸⁷ This tradition contains all the basic elements that were to go into the saga of the return of Ḥusayn with the *Mahdī*, elements which were woven into some of the most fantastic tales.

In another account contemporary with the one just quoted, we read of the return not only of Ḥusayn, but of the Prophet, 'Alī and Ḥasan as well. Here, clearly the *Mahdī* was regarded first and foremost as an

avenger and only secondarily as the messiah at whose hands God would establish equity and justice in the earth. In this tradition, moreover, the Prophet and the first three *imāms* appear before the *Mahdī* with multitudes of angels and all the prophets of old. We are told that on the night of a Friday, the eve of the *Mahdī*'s return, God will send an angel to the heaven of this world. Before dawn, the angel will set up pulpits of light for Muḥammad, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn near the sacred house of Mecca. The gates of heaven will be opened, and all prophets and believers with innumerable angels will join the Prophet and his vicegerents. At sunset the Prophet will exclaim:

O Lord, Thy promise which Thou didst give in Thy Book, 'God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land, even as He made those who were before them successors.'⁸⁸

All the angels and prophets will repeat the same words. Then Muḥammad, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will bow down in prostration and say, 'O Lord show Thou Thy wrath, for the sanctity of Thy women servants has been violated; Thy elect ones were killed and Thy pious servants humiliated.'⁸⁹

Before we look briefly again at the return of Ḥusayn and his final part in the drama of the consummation of time and human history, we shall attempt a reconstruction of the story of the reappearance and reign of the *Mahdī*. The ideas of the following sketch are drawn from several often contradictory traditions. We shall attempt only to present an outline of the *Mahdī*'s activities, bearing in mind that the simple historical sequence here presented gives no indication of the complexity of the material on which we draw.⁹⁰

The *Mahdī* will appear on the day of 'Āshūrā'. Six months prior to his appearance, in Jumāda II and through the first ten days of Rajab, the heavens will pour down heavy rains such as were never experienced before. With this rain, God will cause the flesh and bodies of believers to sprout out of the earth. The sixth *Imām*, to whom this tradition is attributed, continues: 'I can see them [the resuscitated believers] hastening to the *Mahdī* while they wipe the dust off their heads.'⁹¹ The *Mahdī* will be joined first by 313 believers, the number of the martyrs of Badr. He will lean his back against the wall of the *Ka'bah* and utter

the Qur'ānic verse: 'God's remainder is better for you, if you are believers. . . .'⁹² Then applying the sacred text to himself, he would add, 'I am the remnant of God in His earth.'⁹³ To the 313 men will be added 10,000 warriors and with this army the victorious 'Proof of God', the *Mahdī*, will proceed to subdue the earth.

That the *Mahdī* will consummate not only the mission of the last prophet Muḥammad and the *imāms* after him, but that of all prophets before him, is clear from the way his mission is related to theirs. Thus we are told that all the angels who were with Noah in the ark, with Abraham in the fiery furnace, with Moses when he parted the sea for the children of Israel, with Jesus when God lifted him up to himself and with Muḥammad in the Battle of Badr, will come to support the *Mahdī* in his struggle.⁹⁴

The *Mahdī*'s continuity with earlier prophets is carried further, identifying him with all the prophets and their vicegerents. A late tradition, attributed to the sixth *Imām*, and reported on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal, tells that the *Mahdī* will stand, leaning his back, against the wall of the *Ka'bah* where he will receive the *bay'ah* of the angels, the *jinn* and the believers of men. Then he will address all creatures, saying, ' . . . He who wishes to look at Adam and Seth [his son and vicegerent], behold I am Adam and Seth.' Then he will mention the rest of the prophets and their vicegerents: Noah and Shem, Abraham and Ishmael, Moses and Joshua, Jesus and Simon Peter, Muḥammad and 'Alī and the rest of the *imāms*; after every prophet he will proclaim, ' . . . Behold I am . . . ' that prophet and his vicegerent.⁹⁵ Then the *Mahdī* will recite the book or scroll (that is, the sacred revelation) of every prophet, and the community of each prophet will testify that this is their book as it was revealed. It is rather strange to see that the Qur'ān, claimed by all Muslims to be free of any distortion (*tahrīf*) or change (*tabdīl*), is treated in this fantastic tradition like any other revealed book. What is said of the Qur'ān is said of all the other books as well:

Then *al-Qā'im* would recite the Qur'ān and the Muslims would exclaim, 'This, by God, is the true Qur'ān which God sent down to Muḥammad, including what is left out of it, distorted and changed.'⁹⁶

Finally, the *Mahdī* will destroy the holy house of Mecca, the *Ka'bah*, except for the first foundations which were raised by Adam and Abraham and his son Ishmael, for what was built subsequently was not built by a prophet or vicegerent.⁹⁷ From his headquarters in Kūfah, the *Mahdī* will send his armies of men, angels and *jinn* to conquer the entire earth. He will avenge the blood of Ḥusayn so that he '... would kill the descendants of the murderers of Ḥusayn in punishment for the deeds of their fathers'.⁹⁸

In the age of the *Mahdī*, space and time will lose their value. Thus, as he stands in the sacred precincts of the *Ka'bah*, Gabriel will call out, 'Hasten all ye men to the *bay'ah* of God!' All the men of the scattered community will hear the call and run to answer it. 'The earth shall be rolled up for them', and they will stand before the Master of the Age in the twinkling of an eye.⁹⁹ The *Mahdī* shall purify the earth of all evil, wrongdoing and falsehood. He will 'call men to Islām anew' and guide them to the truth.¹⁰⁰ There will be no unbeliever at that time who will not return to the true faith, nor will there be any corruption in men or things. All infirmities will be healed and all disease, poverty and privation will disappear forever. 'In his reign lions will be tamed, the earth will give forth its fruits in abundance and the heavens will pour down their blessings.'¹⁰¹

The era of the *Mahdī* is like the peaceable kingdom envisioned by the ancient prophet of Israel.¹⁰² The *Shī'ī* vision of an era of absolute peace, prosperity and blessing goes further than the Isaianic vision, resembling more closely perhaps the new earth envisioned by the venerable seer of Patmos, St. John the Divine.¹⁰³ Like the beloved disciple John, the sixth *Imām* al-Ṣādiq envisioned an earth 'resplendent with the light of its Lord'¹⁰⁴ where men 'will have no need for the light of the sun or moon, and darkness will be dispelled forever'.¹⁰⁵

If, however, the *imāms* and their early followers were satisfied with such a great vision, the imagination of subsequent generations, fired perhaps by the years of long and fruitless anticipation with no visible *imām* to give guidance, could stop at nothing less than the revenge of the martyred *Imām* Ḥusayn himself for his own blood. We have already seen in this chapter two references to the return (*karrah*) of Ḥusayn to this world to exact vengeance for his own blood. In neither of the two traditions, however, were any details given of the execution

of the martyred *Imām*'s revenge. In fact, our second account does not necessarily have to be interpreted as an actual return; rather it can be seen as a temporary spiritual appearance by the Prophet and the three *imāms* who play no further role in the final episode of this eschatological drama here on earth.

One of the most explicit traditions to speak of the actual return of Ḥusayn is reported on the authority of the notorious disciple of the sixth *Imām*, Abu al-Khaṭṭāb. He related from the sixth *Imām* that:

The first to be brought forth from the earth and to return to this world is Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī. For the return (*raj'ah*) is not general, but rather limited. Only those who manifested true belief or extreme unbelief (*shirk*) will be returned [that is, before the resurrection].¹⁰⁶

In another tradition reported on the authority of Ḥumrān Ibn A'yūn, a famous disciple of the fifth and sixth *Imāms*, the fifth *Imām* said that Ḥusayn will come back to this world and reign for a long time, until ' . . . his eyebrows shall fall over his eyes of old age'.¹⁰⁷ It is further related that Ḥusayn himself described his own *raj'ah* as well as his great achievements: he would conquer India and break every idol; he would kill every animal which God had made unlawful (*ḥarām*) to eat, so that only clean animals remain on the earth; finally, he would make Jews and Christians choose between Islām and the sword. Those who accept Islām will be greatly rewarded while those who refuse will be put to the sword. In his reign, trees will break under the burden of their own fruits and people will be able to eat summer fruits in winter and winter fruits in summer. Every infirm person will be cured, and every poor person well provisioned.¹⁰⁸

The drama we have been following has many endings. We saw one possible conclusion in the final vindication of Fāṭimah and the revenge that is to be exacted by all the *imāms* as they one by one kill their enemies. The sixth *Imām* declared that after this, 'All anger shall be appeased and all sorrow forgotten.'¹⁰⁹ These endings, connected with the return of Ḥusayn and his venerable father and grandfather, are the products of later imagination. The early scene fades almost imperceptibly into the celestial realms, and on the Day of Resurrection Ḥusayn will witness the death of his victorious descendant, the *Mahdī*.

Since no one should perform the funerary duties of a vicegerent except another vicegerent,¹¹⁰ Ḥusayn will bury the *Mahdī* and reign in his stead with his companions who were killed with him in Karbalā' for three hundred long years.

This will not, however, be the end. The millennial reign of Ḥusayn will culminate with the final defeat of Satan and all his hosts. The man at whose hands this final victory will be achieved is 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, the heroic wielder of the great sword (*dhū al-fīqār*). Then, 'God the Invincible (*al-Jabbār*) himself will descend in clouds of fire with the angels', and his eternal decree will be executed.¹¹¹ This final battle against the very principle of evil will naturally be fought near Karbalā', the stage of the earthly portion of our drama.

We have insisted throughout this study that Ḥusayn, the great martyr, embodies for the *Shī'ī* community the entire drama of suffering, revenge and redemption. That the *imāms*, especially the twelfth, will play a major role in this drama is of course clear from all that we have said. But that the entire drama revolves around Ḥusayn, who is its omnipresent hero, is equally indisputable. In fact, it may safely be stated that, at least for later *Shī'ī* piety, this great universal drama which began before creation with Ḥusayn as its chief character will end with him. What follows on the Day of Resurrection will be simply a foregone conclusion of his final judgment. Through his death, Ḥusayn provided the final proof or contention (*hujjah*) of God over and against His creation. Hence, it will be his prerogative to pronounce the divine judgment over all men. Thus the sixth *Imām* is supposed to have boldly asserted, 'The one who shall conduct the final reckoning (*ḥisāb*) of men before the Day of Resurrection is Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī. As for the Day of Resurrection itself, it shall be a day of sending forth (*ba'th*) to the Garden or to the Fire.'¹¹²

Thus the cycle will be completed. We began with a pure and holy creation, a creation which has been confronted with a choice between judgment or salvation. History is the stage on which this choice is painfully and dramatically worked out. When the process is completed, creation will return to its original purity and 'the earth shall be changed to other than the earth'.¹¹³ All dominion will belong to God.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

We have traced the long drama of suffering, martyrdom and redemption in *Shi'ī* piety from its beginning in the time before time was, to its end in the eternal future, when time will be no longer. Through the sufferings of the friends of God, time and history, human history, will be redeemed. Furthermore, this long drama, although special personages play central roles in it, has the entire universe for its stage and all creatures as members of its universal cast.

The phenomenon of redemption through suffering in the long history of man's religiousness is, we believe, both ancient and universal. It may be seen in the interaction of diverse cultures and religious traditions, but more profoundly in the way men and women through the ages, in different areas of the world, have expressed their yearnings for a better and redeemed existence and the confidence of faith in this possibility. This affirmation of life in the face of death has been proclaimed in our world in many languages and forms of expression. The worshippers of Tammuz, on the very spot where the martyr of Karbalā' fell, expressed this affirmation in the confidence that the mysterious power of life would return to replenish their food stores. Yet their tears and supplications were necessary to call back the youthful God from the depths of darkness and death. Love for Tammuz was love for life, the love of husband and wife, mother and son and brother and sister.¹

The prophets of ancient Israel, heir to the rich legacy of Mesopotamian religion and culture, expressed this affirmation of life and salvation in the intense sufferings of the 'servant of the Lord'.² The servant who is first presented in the most pathetic state of degradation and suffering is then hailed as the exalted messenger of the Lord and His mouthpiece. The servant of the Lord has lived through the history of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the embodiment of all suffering, both the collective sufferings of the community of the faithful and also the personal sufferings of the ancient prophets and crucified Christ.³

Had the suffering servant of the Lord been introduced to *Shī'ī* Muslims, he would have found, we believe, a prominent place in the long drama of suffering in *Shī'ī* piety as well.

The drama of Karbalā' has had a colorful history in the folklore, literature, art and religious piety of the *Shī'ī* community, although this aspect of the history of Karbalā' had to be largely left out of our discussion. The dynamic personality of *Imām* Ḥusayn, as he continues to live and grow in the Muslim community, deserves more attention as well, since he both reflects its experience of failure and expresses its hopes and aspirations. In times of alienation, struggle and persecution, Ḥusayn uttered the curses and condemnations of his small community of followers against their oppressors. In times of security and prosperity, he provided an example of all the virtues to which a free and prosperous community should aspire.

Like other redeeming martyrs before him, Ḥusayn played the role of the 'prince of peace', healing and redeeming human existence, and the role of the terrible judge who metes out the awful punishment of strict justice with no mercy. These two sides of cruel judgment and compassionate pardon are common, in our view, to every phenomenon of redemption. Generally speaking, characterization of a martyr as a stern judge is the product of political failure and social and religious oppression and, moreover, continues to nourish the community's hope for a better future. This side of a character is usually stressed in proportion to the harshness of the community's circumstance and the bitterness that follows a bleak moment in its history. It is perhaps not altogether accidental that the apocalyptic literature of early Christianity, of which the Apocalypse of John is a good example, was the product of the period of Roman persecution of the church. Likewise, most of the harsh and fantastic traditions dealing with revenge and judgment in *Shī'ī* piety belong to the period of difficult times which the communities experienced in early 'Abbāsīd rule, before Buwayhid ascendancy.

It is not, however, difficult to see the other side of Ḥusayn's character, the side of mercy, love, healing and forgiveness, expressed often in stark contradiction to its opposite. In the *Mahdī's* reign, universal brotherhood, true faith, comfort and happiness will prevail. Indeed, there is a tremendous difference between the traditions discussed in

this study and the comment of a friend of the author, son of one of the most important *Shī'ī 'ulamā'* of our times, who asserted that the *Mahdī* died at the end of his lesser concealment which ended with the death of his last representative, about 80 years after the *Mahdī*'s birth. This, of course, means that the twelfth *Imām* was no more than a spiritual leader of the community, though in hiding, to be sure. His return can no more be expected than that of any of his predecessors. (This same friend insists, as do many modern *Shī'ī 'ulamā'* and educated people, that the only lesson we have in the death of Ḥusayn is his courage, piety and self-sacrifice.⁴) When the traditions of intercession, rewards for sorrow over his death and the miraculous aspects of his life and martyrdom are mentioned, such people dismiss them with manifest embarrassment and even irritation. 'Ḥusayn died', a prominent *ālim* told me, 'in protest against the hunger of the hungry, the poverty of the poor and the oppression of the oppressed.' This one-sided emphasis on the significance of the death of the 'prince of martyrs' may perhaps provide a basis for unity across the barriers of sectarian differences and inspiration to meet the needs of today's world with equanimity and trust, faith and purpose. The lesson derived from this modern emphasis is more concrete and relevant to our problems now than the earlier emphasis on abstract sufferings and hopes.

In 1970, Cairo audiences saw a moving drama on the death of Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn the revolutionary hero and great martyr. In the closing lines of this interpretative play, Ḥusayn appears from across the centuries (indicated by a dark stage and the suggestion of a ghost-like appearance) to teach yet another lesson:

Remember me not through the shedding of the blood of others, but remember me when you seek to save the truth from the claws of falsehood. Remember me as you struggle in order that justice may reign over you, remember me in your struggle. . . . Remember me when virtue finds itself a stranger and lonely and when vice is preferred to virtue. . . . Remember me when courage and foolishness are mingled and confused, and when greed and self-interest become the sole standard by which friendship is judged. . . . Remember me in your tears; when the meek and lowly are oppressed. Remember me when religion is belied by the cries of

hungry stomachs and when the corrupt among you are set up in government over the destiny of the men of faith. Remember me when the singing of nightingales in your lives would be overcome by howls of pain and when the sound of clinking glasses drowns the cries of weepers. . . . When the song of brotherhood disappears and when the poor complain and the pockets of the rich bulge, remember me. . . . Remember me when all these things take place and rise up in the name of life to lift up high the emblem of justice and truth. Remember my revenge so that you may exact it from tyrants. In this, life will find its victory. But if you hold your peace against deception and accept humiliation, then I would be slain anew. I would be killed every day a thousand times. I would be killed every time a zealous man is silent or a man of endurance slackens. I would be killed whenever men are subjugated and humiliated. I would be killed as long as some Yazīd rules over you and does what he pleases. . . . Then would the wound of the martyr forever curse you because you did not avenge the blood of the martyr. Avenge the blood of the martyr.⁵

Appendices

A. APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 1: 'THE HOUSE OF SORROWS'

A.1 EARLIER PROPHETS

a. *On Abraham*

- God: O Abraham, who is the dearest of my creatures to you?
- Abraham: O my Lord, there is no one among Thy creatures dearer to me than Thy beloved Muḥammad.
- God: Is he dearer to you, or your own self?
- Abraham: No, rather he is dearer to me than my own self.
- God: Are his children dearer to you or your own?
- Abraham: No, his children are dearer to me than my own children.
- God: Is the slaying of his child at the hands of his enemies more painful to your heart or the slaying of your own child in obedience to me?
- Abraham: O Lord, rather the slaying of his child at the hands of his enemies is more painful to my heart.
- God: O Abraham, a group of men claiming to be of the community (*ummah*) of Muḥammad will kill his son Ḥusayn wrongly after him. He shall be slain like a lamb, and they shall incur through their action my wrath.¹

Abraham was filled with sorrow and grief and began to weep bitterly. Then God said to him, 'O Abraham, I have through your grief for Ḥusayn and his martyrdom ransomed your grief for your own son as though you had slain him with your own hand, and have granted you the highest of stations [i.e., in paradise] among those visited with afflictions (*maṣā'ib*).' 'Thus', the sixth *Imām* concluded, 'God said,

“And We have ransomed him [Ishmael] with a great sacrificial victim.”²

b. *On Moses*

An Israelite who believed in Moses, that is, in his prophetic mission, saw him going to the mountain to converse with God. He asked him to beg divine forgiveness for a grave sin which he had committed. In his prayer, Moses asked for forgiveness for that man and received the call (*nidā'*), ‘O Moses, I forgive anyone who supplicates me except the murderer of Ḥusayn.’ Moses asked who Ḥusayn was and was told, ‘. . . he of whom you were informed while standing at the *Jānib al-Ṭūr* (the mountain of revelation).’ Moses then asked about who Ḥusayn’s murderers would be. The answer was as follows:

He shall be killed by the perverse and reprobate community (*ummah*) of his grandfather in the land of Karbalā'. His horse shall run away lamenting and neighing, saying, ‘Alas, alas, for a community killing the son of its Prophet’s daughter.’ Ḥusayn shall remain stretched on the sands without washing or shrouding. His goods will be pillaged and his womenfolk taken captive. His supporters will be killed and their heads paraded in the lands on the tips of spears. O Moses, their young ones will die of thirst and their old, their skins will dry up into wrinkles. They shall cry out for help, but shall find no one to lend them support.³

Hearing this, Moses wept bitterly and asked what the punishment of their murderers would be. He was answered,

Theirs will be a torment so great that the people of the fire will seek refuge therefrom in the fire. They shall not receive my mercy nor the intercession of his grandfather. Were it not for his [Ḥusayn’s] sake, I would have caused the earth to swallow them up.

Then God continued,

I have prescribed mercy for his followers among my faithful servants. Know, moreover, that he who weeps for him or causes others to weep or even attempts or pretends to weep, I shall render his flesh inviolate from the fire.⁴

c. *On Jesus*

It is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that when he and 'Alī were returning from the battle of *Şiffīn*, the latter cried out with a loud voice, 'O Ibn 'Abbās, do you know what place this is?' 'No', he answered. 'Alī continued, 'Had you known it as I know it, you would have wept like me.' The two then wept for a long time, after which 'Alī made his ablutions and performed his prayers. He fell asleep under a tree, and when he awoke he related a dream he had during that afternoon nap.

He saw men coming down from heaven carrying white flags with white, shining swords in their hands. They circled the spot once, after which 'Alī saw the palm tree under which he was sleeping bow down low touching the ground with its branches. Congealed blood flowed copiously from it.

'Alī continued relating his dream: 'I can now picture myself seeing Ḥusayn drowning in that blood, crying out for help but with no one to help him.' Then the men attired in white called out to him, 'Have patience, O family of the Apostle, for you shall be killed at the hands of the most wicked of men.' They went on addressing Ḥusayn, 'Behold, O Abū 'Abdallāh, the Garden of Paradise (*jannah*) is longing for you.' The men then turned to 'Alī and consoled him, saying '. . . be of good cheer for God shall make him [Ḥusayn] a consolation for your eyes on the day when men shall rise up before the Lord of the worlds.' 'Alī then told Ibn 'Abbās what was to befall his son Ḥusayn, as he himself had heard it from the Prophet.

'Alī then asked Ibn 'Abbās to look for the manure of gazelles, which was buried under that tree, and which had turned yellow with age. 'Alī took the manure, smelled it and exclaimed, 'By God, that is it! For Jesus son of Mary had smelled it before.' Then 'Alī related to Ibn 'Abbās the story of Jesus in the land of Karbalā':

Jesus one day passed with his disciples through Karbalā' and on that spot they saw a group of gazelles gathered together weeping. Jesus and his disciples sat and wept with them, without the disciples knowing the reason for that lamentation. Jesus finally told them that this was a spot on which was to be killed the young descendant (*farkh*) of the Apostle Aḥmad, and child of the pure, unblemished

virgin (*batūl*) [Fāṭimah] who is like my mother. He [Ḥusayn] shall be buried in this spot whose soil (*tīnah*) is more fragrant than musk. For it is the burial place of the martyr [Ḥusayn]. Such is the soil containing the bodies of prophets and descendants of prophets.

Jesus then told his disciples that these gazelles had told him that they had been grazing in that place out of longing for the soil that was to contain the remains of the 'blessed shoot' of the Prophet Muḥammad. The gazelles told Jesus that they were safe from all dangers in that place. Jesus then took a few pellets of the gazelles' manure and smelled them saying, 'Behold the manure of these gazelles has such sweet odors because of the grass of this place. Preserve it therefore, O Lord, that his [Ḥusayn's] father may also smell it, so that it may be for him a consolation and a relief.'

Then 'Alī wept until he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he gave the manure to Ibn 'Abbās, charging him to guard it until it would turn into congealed blood, a sign for him to know that Ḥusayn had been killed. Ibn 'Abbās always kept the manure in his sleeve. One day he slept after his noon prayers, and suddenly woke up shaking with fear as he felt the hot blood gushing out of his sleeve. This, of course, happened on the tenth of Muḥarram, at the exact hour when Ḥusayn was killed. Other portents were seen and witnessed in Medina, but these are considered in Chapter 4.⁵

A.2 THE HOLY FAMILY

a. *On Fāṭimah*

The following selection is taken from a long discourse attributed to the Prophet, already cited above.

As for my daughter, Fāṭimah, she is the mistress of the women of the worlds, those that were and those that are to come, and she is part of me. She is the human houri who when she enters her prayer chamber before God, exalted be He, her light shines to the angels of heaven as the stars shine to the inhabitants of the earth. Thus when I saw her I recalled what will be done to her after me. I could see how

humiliation shall enter her home, her sanctity shall be violated, her rights usurped, her inheritance denied and her troubles multiplied. She shall lose her child [through miscarriage], all the while crying out, 'O my Muḥammad', but no one will come to her aid. After me she will remain sorrowful and grieved and weeping; at times recalling the cessation of revelation (*wahī*) from her house, at other times my departure from her. When night comes upon her, she shall feel lonesome, missing my voice which she was used to hearing as I recited the Qur'ān by night. She shall find herself humiliated after being loved and well treated during the life of her father. Then God will console her with angels who will address her with the words he addressed to Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān. They will say to her, 'O Fāṭimah . . . God has chosen thee, and purified thee; He has chosen thee above all women. (Fāṭimah) . . . be obedient to thy Lord, prostrating and bowing before Him.'⁶

Then her pains will commence and she will fall ill. God will send to her Mary daughter of 'Imrān, to nurse and console her in her sickness. She shall then say, 'O Lord, I truly despise this life and have become troubled with the people of this world; let me therefore depart to my father.' Thus she will be the first to come to me from my family. She will come to me sorrowful and heavy with grief, persecuted and martyred. Then will I say, 'O God, curse those who wrong her, punish those who persecuted her, humiliate those who humiliated her, and consign eternally into Thy fire him who hit her side so that she lost her child.' Then the angels will reply: Amen.⁷

b. *On the Holy Family and the Bedouin convert*

A Bedouin of one of the tribes in the neighborhood of Medina came to the Prophet who was sitting with his companions, reviling him and calling him a magician and a liar. He had hidden in his sleeve a small lizard (*dabb*) which he had caught in the desert. He let the animal go and the Prophet called it to him, asking it, 'Do you know who I am?' The animal answered, 'You are Muḥammad, the Apostle of God.' In astonishment and recognition of the Prophet's claims and forbearance, the Bedouin embraced Islām. But he was poor and hungry and none of the companions had anything to give him to eat. Confident of

Fāṭimah's generosity and compassion, the Prophet sent Salmān, the Persian, to her seeking food for the hungry man. She had nothing but her own clothes, so she sent her cloak to be pawned with Simon the Jew for a bushel of barley and a tray of dates. She baked the barley, after grinding it with her own hands, and sent the bread and dates to feed the new Muslim. With joy the Prophet came to her, but found her pale with hunger and her two children, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, asleep, trembling like slaughtered birds from hunger as no one in the house of 'Alī had tasted anything for three days. The Prophet saw this and his eyes were filled with tears, and he did not know what to do.

Fāṭimah then entered her chamber and prayed a few *rak'ahs*,⁸ after which she invoked God saying, 'O Lord, send to us a banquet (*mā'idah*) from heaven as Thou hadst sent it to the children of Israel. They disbelieved it, yet will we be in it believers.'⁹ As she finished her prayer, a banquet was sent from heaven and they all ate. The Prophet, with joy and gratitude, exclaimed, 'Thanks be to God who had granted me a child like Mary who, . . . whenever Zechariah went in to her in the Sanctuary, he found her provisioned. "Mary", he said, "How comes this to thee?" "From God", she said.'¹⁰

c. On the Holy Family and the Thorn tree

The Prophet visited one day the quarters of a tribe near Medina which had not yet entered into the Muslim community. Some versions of this tradition say that he was with his family and that they had a meal together, reminiscent of the people of the cloak tradition and sometimes including it.¹¹ After the meal, the Prophet washed his hands and mouth for prayers and expectorated the water from his mouth onto a thorn tree near the tent of his hosts. The next day the thorn tree began to grow and bear leaves, and soon became a great fruitful tree. Its fruits tasted like honey and had a fragrance like musk. They were satisfying food for the hungry, and its leaves were medicine for the sick. After the death of the Prophet its fruits began to decrease, and thus it continued after the death of his daughter. The fruits totally disappeared with the death of 'Alī. Yet the leaves remained a cure for the sick all around Medina, and a source of blessing for all people. They began, however, to wither away and fall after the death of Ḥasan. The

tree itself finally dried up and died with the death of Ḥusayn. On the day he died (that is, the day of 'Āshūrā'), its bark emitted streams of blood, to the astonishment of everyone. The people knew that this was a sign of a great calamity. Soon after, the tree disappeared and not even a trace of it was to be seen.¹²

B. APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3: 'THE MASTER OF THE YOUTHS OF PARADISE'

B.1 DISCOURSES OF *Imām* ḤUSAYN

In a long sermon which he delivered in Medina before his journey to Iraq, Ḥusayn first recounted the great benefits the community had received through Islām. He reminded his listeners of the duties and obligations which God had laid upon them and which they had neglected: they had not shown mercy to the weak; they had indulged in wrongdoings; and they continued to prefer this world to the next, as though it were their eternal abode. Then he spoke of his own claims to leadership and his motives in seeking it:

O God Thou knowest that we did not seek, in that which we have done, the acquisition of power, or the possession of the remains of ephemeral wealth. Rather we seek to manifest the truths of Thy religion and establish the right in Thy lands; so that the wrong among Thy servants may be vindicated, and that men may abide by the ordinances (*farā'id*), paths (*sunan*) and Thy judgments (*aḥkām*). If therefore you [men] would deal with us justly and lend us your support it shall be to your good. For behold wrongdoers have prevailed over you, and they seek to extinguish the light of your Prophet. It is to God that we go for help, in Him we trust, to Him we refer judgment and to Him shall be our return.¹³

On his way to Karbalā', Ḥusayn met the famous poet, al-Farazdaq, just outside Mecca. He asked the poet about the situation in Kūfah, and was told that while the hearts of men were with him, their swords were with the Umayyads. Ḥusayn recited the following verses in answer to the poet's advice not to go to Iraq.¹⁴

If the world be counted a thing precious, still the abode of God's reward [that is, paradise] is higher and more noble. And if bodies be made for death, then the death of a man by the sword in the way of God is the better choice. And if men's provisions be allotted by divine decree, then it is more worthy of a man not to run after worldly gain. And if wealth be gathered in order to be finally left behind, why should a man be tight-fisted with that which he would have to abandon.¹⁵

The following little sermon Ḥusayn delivered to his companions on the way to Karbalā', when he had learned of the treachery of the Kūfans, won over by Ibn Ziyād by bribes and threats:

Behold this world had changed and taken on a false character. Its goodness has disappeared so that there is no more left of it than a drop of stagnant water in a large vessel, or the scant grass of a poor pasture. Do you not see that righteousness is not sought after, and falsehood is not abandoned. Let the man of faith therefore seek the company of his Lord in truth. For I see death as a state of bliss and life with the wrongdoers as a heavy burden. Verily men are the slaves of wealth, and religion is no more than words upon their lips which they ruminate. They profess it as long as their life provisions flow, but when tried with afflictions, the number of the men of faith is diminished.¹⁶

Shortly before reaching Karbalā', after learning of the death of his cousin Muslim, Ḥusayn sent a letter to the Kūfans with his brother in nursing:¹⁷

Furthermore, woe to you O men for your loss; when you cried to us in fear we answered you with all haste. But you unsheathed a sword against us which was in our own right hand. You have kindled against us a fire which we spark against our enemy and yours. Thus you turned against your friends and became a strong arm for your enemies. You did this not because they established justice among you, nor that you had any such hope in them. Nor have we done you any wrong, or have wavered in our resolve. Yours then shall be great woes. You have abandoned [your allegiance] when the sword has not yet been wielded, your resolve shaken and your opinion

mistaken. At first you hastened to it [that is, allegiance to him] like flies, and then ran away as would butterflies. Fie on you and malediction on the satans of this community, the unfaithful partisans and abandoners of the Book, those who . . . distort their words, and oppose the practices (*sunan*) by adopting illegitimate children into their families.¹⁸

. . . by God, it is a treachery well known among you, for in it you were born and grew up. . . . May God's curse be upon those who revoke their oaths after asserting them, for God shall be their witness. Behold the usurper, the son of a pretender [Yazīd], has sought to force one of two alternatives from us: either strife or humiliation. But far be it from us to accept humiliation, neither God nor the faithful would wish that for us. Ours are pure abodes [the reference here is to his lineage on both sides] and uplifted heads [literally, *noses*] and resolute hearts to prefer obedience to dissolute men (*li'ām*) over the death of noble men. Thus I shall rush upon them with this small following in spite of the fierceness of the enemy, their large numbers, and abandonment of those who pledged their support. . . . in God your Lord and mine I trust.¹⁹

B.2 SHORT SAYINGS OF *Imām* HUSAYN

He said one day to a man who was indulging in gossip against another, 'O man, cease your backbiting, for backbiting is the nourishment of the dogs of the fire [hell].'

A man said to him, 'A good deed done to an undeserving man is lost.' He answered, 'No not so, rather a good deed is like the pouring of rain: it falls on the righteous as well as the wicked.'

He once said, describing the difference of worship and motives for it, 'There are those who worship God only in fear [i.e., of Hell], and that is the worship of slaves; there are those who worship God in covetousness [i.e., of Paradise] and that is the worship of merchants; but there are those who worship God in thankfulness and this is the worship of free men; it is the best of worship.'²⁰

B.3 PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS OF *Imām ḤUSAYN*

The following two prayers attributed to Ḥusayn are warm with the glow of piety and genuine mystical love of God. One day he was heard by Sharīḥ, one of the companions of the Prophet, praying thus after offering his obligatory prayers in the mosque of Medina.

My Lord and Master, is it for the instruments of torture in hell that Thou hast created my members and hast Thou made my entrails to be filled with the *ḥamīm* [the boiling waters of hell]. My God if Thou wouldst require of me reckoning for my sins, I would request of Thee magnanimity. If Thou wouldst imprison me with the transgressors, I would tell them of my love for Thee. My Lord, as for my obedience to Thee it can benefit Thee not; and as for my disobedience, it can do Thee no harm. Grant me therefore I pray that which benefits Thee not, and forgive me that which doth Thee no harm, for Thou art the most Merciful.²¹

The following selection is a truly mystical colloquy between man, the friend (*walī*) of God, and his Lord. It shows at one and the same time the humility of the servant in worship and the intimate love which the Lord has for him. One day Ḥusayn passed with Mālik Ibn Anas, a famous companion, by the tomb of Khadījah, the Prophet's first wife and Ḥusayn's grandmother. Ḥusayn began to weep and asked Mālik to leave him alone for awhile. After long prayers, Mālik heard him praying:

My Lord, O my Lord Thou art my Master. Have mercy therefore on a servant who seeks refuge in Thee. On Thee, O most High, is my reliance, blessed is he whose Master Thou art. Blessed is he who is a vigilant servant bringing all his troubles before Thee Lord of majesty alone. Where in him there would be neither disease nor sickness, rather only his love for his Master. When he complains of his trouble and tightness of throat [with tears], God would answer him and remove his sorrow. When in darkness he comes in supplication, God would grant him His favors and draw him nigh. Then he shall be addressed 'Lo, I hear the *labbayka* O my servant, for thou art in my bosom (*kanaf*) and all that thou didst say We have heard. Thy

voice delights my angels, behold We have heard thy voice. Thy invocations are before me moving behind veils [of light], behold We have removed the curtains for thee. . . . ask me therefore without fear or hesitation, or any reckoning, for I am God.²²

C. APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 4: 'THE WRONGED MARTYR'

CONCERNING ḤUSAYN'S ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

The text from which this appendix is taken was first published by the Catholic Press in Beirut, Lebanon, under the title *al-Haft w-al-Azillah*. The present edition was published under another title, *al-Haft al-Sharīf*,²³ dealing with the virtues of the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Šādiq, and attributed to one of the *Imām*'s most important disciples, al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn 'Umar al-Ju'fī.

The earlier Catholic Press edition considered the text as a medieval *Ismā'īlī* document. But the editor of the present edition, Muṣṭafā Ghālib, who is an *Ismā'īlī* himself, spends much time in the introduction refuting this attribution and attributing the text instead to the *Nuṣayrī Shī'ī* sect. There is, as we shall see below, some textual evidence for Ghālib's claim in the frequent references to *al-Qā'im*, the expected *Mahdī* of the Twelver and *Nuṣayrī Shī'ī* sects. We give below some selections from chapters 38 through 40, concerning the killing of an *imām* and the killing of Ḥusayn considered from the esoteric point of view.

Chapter 38. 'Concerning the Knowledge of the Killing of an *Imām*'

Said al-Mufaḍḍal, 'I said to my master, al-Šādiq, tell me about the killing of the *Imām* and how can that happen. He smiled showing his teeth and said, "Perhaps you mean the killing of Ḥusayn and the way he was slain and the death of the Prince of the Faithful ['Alī] and the death of Zakarīyyah [Zechariah] and Yaḥyā [John the Baptist] and Jesus" . . . [al-Šādiq continued], These are, O Mufaḍḍal, the pure ones of God, His friends (*awlīyā'*) and elect. You [people]

imagine them to have tasted the pain of the sharp steel at the hands of their enemies. But this is only outwardly (*fī al-zāhir*) so that the proof, or contention (*ḥujjah*) of God may be established against them.²⁴ But that they could be actually killed, that cannot be as God preserves His friends and elect.”²⁵

Chapter 39. ‘Concerning the Esoteric Knowledge of the Death of Ḥusayn’

Said al-Mufaḍḍal, ‘I asked our master al-Ṣādiq, may his peace be upon us, concerning God saying, “And We ransomed him [Ismā‘īl] with a mighty sacrifice.”²⁶ Al-Ṣādiq replied “Ḥasan, during the time of Abraham, was Isaac, and Ḥusayn, Ishmael.” Then I said, “O master, tell me about the story of Jesus.” He answered, “Do you consider Jesus to be greater with God than all the apostles, prophets, and all the pure vicegerents? Nay, rather it is that if God wishes to manifest something, He manifests it only in part, so that it may be possible to discover through the outwardly manifest, the inward and hidden, and so that through the part, the whole may be discovered. Thus men would not wax arrogant against God’s power which shall never cease from prophets, vicegerents and elect ones. Ḥusayn, son of ‘Alī, therefore, is more exalted with God than to cause him to test the pains of the iron [sword] at the hands of unbelievers. Far be it from God to do that, for His grace and providential decrees would suffice for His friends, protecting them and destroying their enemies and His with the inexorable proof. . . . Thus God acted with Ḥusayn in a way He did not with Jesus, Zechariah or John the Baptist, or with any other of the prophets. For the slaying outwardly was meant for Ishmael who was ransomed by a great sacrifice. Ḥusayn was he [Ishmael] himself in his lineage and identity, no difference between the two, for they are one. He was not, as the people of unbelief imagine, slain a thousand times.²⁷ Rather Ḥusayn is like Jesus, as it is written . . . ‘and for their saying “We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God”, yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him: they have no knowledge of him except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of cer-

tainty, no indeed, God raised him up to Him.’²⁸ This is the way in which Prophets and friends [of God] and vicegerents should be considered to have been killed, and God does whatever He wills.

Then the *Imām* asked about the exegesis of the verses²⁹ concerning the ransom of Ishmael according to the opinion of non-*Shī’īs*. They believe that a ram was sent from paradise to ransom Ishmael; the sixth *Imām* objected, saying that God would never allow a creature made for paradise to be killed without a sin, for He is a just God: thus this view is an error (*kufṛ*). Then he asks al-Mufaḍḍal who was the greater, the ransomed one or the ransoming victim, and answers his own question by stating that greatness is predicated of the ransoming victim. We saw earlier that Ḥusayn was identified with Ishmael, and here he is identified with the paradisiacal ram; hence, the ransomed one, the ransoming victim and real ransom are one.

. . . If people were to know of that great victim, their wonderment would never cease and their minds would be deranged, and their unbelief and enmity towards God and His Apostle would increase. . . . O Mufaḍḍal the ram that was brought as ransom was Ḥusayn, then called at that time al-Adlam, the Adlam of Quraysh. He was at that time an old man in the form of a ram. . . .

The *Imām* asked al-Mufaḍḍal about the opinion of the *Shī’ī* community. ‘They believe’, al-Mufaḍḍal said, ‘that Isaac was Ḥasan and Ishmael Ḥusayn.’ The sixth *Imām* approved, saying, . . . ‘They tell the truth, for Ḥusayn is more exalted before God than to be slain. But men do not know the status of the friends of God [with Him]. Our *Shī’ah*, however, learn esoteric knowledge from us, which is the knowledge of God, His vicegerents and Apostle Muḥammad, and transmitted to their faithful brethren.’ . . . al-Mufaḍḍal said, ‘O master you have healed me and have taken away from me all the sorrow and care.’ Al-Ṣādiq replied, ‘God is truly a healing for that which is in the breasts and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) is a healing for breasts. . . .’ Then al-Ṣādiq said, ‘I have told you of the story of the slaying of the ram, would you wish me to tell you the story of those who gathered to kill Ḥusayn?’ ‘Yes’, I answered.

*Chapter 40. 'Concerning the Esoteric Knowledge of the Death of Ḥusayn During the Time of the Umayyads'*³⁰

Said al-Mufaḍḍal, 'Tell me, O master, concerning Ḥusayn, how it seemed to men that they killed him as it seemed before to them concerning the killing of Jesus.' Al-Ṣādiq said, 'This is one of the secrets of God which He made hidden from men, making it known only to the faithful of His servants, the elect ones. For the *Imām* enters into bodies as he chooses and leaves them as he chooses, as one would remove his cloak or shirt, without any fear or doubt. As they gathered to slay Ḥusayn, he left his body and God lifted him up to Him. Thus God prevented enemies from catching him. . . . When Ḥusayn left for Iraq, and God was hidden (*muḥtajib*) in him, whenever he stopped on his journey, Gabriel came and conversed with him. On the day the soldiers were gathered against him and the war began, Ḥusayn called Gabriel and asked, "O My brother Gabriel, who am I?" Gabriel answered, "You are God other than whom there is no God, the Living, the Eternal, He the one who causes to die and makes alive."³¹ You are the one who can order the heavens and they would obey You; the earth and it would be subject to Your command; the mountains, and they would execute Your orders; the seas, and they would hasten to Your obedience. You are He to whom neither the plotting of a plotter would touch, nor the hurt of a hurter." Ḥusayn said, "O Gabriel . . . do you see these miserable creatures ignorantly seeking to kill their master, but they will not reach me, nor any other of the friends of God. . . ." Then Ḥusayn said, "O Gabriel, go to that accursed and ignorant one [Ibn Sa'd] and ask him whom does he wish to fight against?"'

Gabriel went to Ibn Sa'd who was sitting among his generals, the scene more like a royal court than a battlefield. The angel put the question to him, and Ibn Sa'd declared that he had to kill Ḥusayn in obedience to the commands of Ibn Ziyād. Gabriel replied, 'Woe to you, would you kill the Lord of the worlds, the God of all men, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and what is between them?' Afraid, Ibn Sa'd ordered his generals to capture him, but Gabriel spat on them and they fell down on their faces. When Ibn Sa'd and his men awoke, he was exceedingly afraid and said to them, 'Have you seen the like of this

before?’ They answered in the negative; one man among them reassured him that this was only the magic which Ḥusayn learned from his father, ‘Alī. Then Ibn Sa‘d shot an arrow in the direction of Ḥusayn’s camp and ordered his army to begin the fighting. The *Imām* then returned to his story and said:

When the soldiers surrounded Ḥusayn, he called Gabriel, Michael and Isrāfīl, and they answered ‘Here we are (*labbayk*) O our Lord.’ He ordered them, ‘Lift me up in the air.’ Thus they lifted Ḥusayn and his servant Gabriel. . . . The sixth *Imām* turned to his disciple and said, ‘O Mufaḍḍal, you have been granted much good, for you have received esoteric knowledge. Beware that you keep the secret of God hidden. Disclose it only to a sincere friend (*walī*). For if you were to disclose it to our enemies, you would help in the destruction of your own soul.’ As al-Mufaḍḍal showed his surprise that such wonderful things should be hidden from men, the sixth *Imām* concluded, ‘Yes, for God wished to be worshipped in secret.’

D. APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5: ‘THE SIGH OF THE SORROWFUL’

D.1 EXAMPLES OF PERSIAN *marāthī*

Persian poetry dealing with the tragedy of Karbalā’ exhibits an emotional intensity, poetic exaggeration and freedom of expression unparalleled in its Arabic counterpart.) We shall illustrate in the following three selections³² first the emphasis on the superiority of Karbalā’ over the *Ka‘bah*, already discussed in Chapter 5 above. Secondly, within the same context, we shall observe how the martyr of Karbalā’ excels all other men in nobility and spiritual gifts, a theme exaggerated to the point of deifying the martyred *Imām*. Finally, we shall quote the famous *marthīyah* or elegy often chanted in the Muḥarram celebrations, illustrating the fascinating theme of erotic love (*ishq*) of the devotees for the *Imām*. This theme of mad love has given Persian poetry a unique character of emotional fervor and mystical longing.

a. *'The Shrine of the Martyrs'*, by Fayiz Iṣfahānī

If the *Ka'bah* is, due to its great honor, the *qiblah* of the people of pure faith, the valley of *karb* [sorrow] and *balā'* [calamity], i.e. Karbalā', is the descending place of the divine lights. That it [Karbalā'] boasts in 'honor over the *Ka'bah* is not too strange, for in its courts the light of God shines most splendidly. If men of this world turn their faces toward the *Ka'bah*, the *Ka'bah* itself has turned its face of devotion (*irādat*) towards Karbalā'. The blood of the elect of God was shed in this realm, it may be said therefore that its soil was mixed with the blood of God. To this desert of afflictions, he, the king [Ḥusayn] himself, made pilgrimage so that you may know that the real *Ka'bah* is here. . . . The *Ka'bah* is the house of God, but this [Karbalā'] is the source of divine lights. Do you not see the great distinction between the two. . . .³³

b. *'May my soul be a ransom for you: you who are both the qiblah and the guide to the qiblah'*

O Ḥusayn, you are the martyr of the cruelty (*sitam*) of the people of treachery. You are the blood of God and son of the blood of God.³⁴

Perhaps the sense intended here is the blood for which God would exact revenge, the blood belonging to God, and not God's own blood.

You were brought up on 'Alī's shoulder, in the lap of Al-Zahrā', and you were the adornment of the bosom of the Apostle of the two realms. On the soil of your land all creatures have prostrated themselves; may my soul be your ransom, you who are the *qiblah* and guide to the *qiblah*. By God, you are the friend (*khalīl*) [i.e. Abraham]; by God you are the great sacrifice (*dhabiḥ*), [i.e. Ishmael]; by God you are the *ḥaram* (*Ka'bah*), Ṣafā and Minā.

Al-Ṣafā and Minā are the two important stages of the *ḥajj* ritual around Mecca.

. . . enemies severed your head with its dry lips from your noble body, although you are both *khiḍr* and the water of life.

This verse alludes to the myth of the *khiḍr* (green prophet), who found the spring of the water of life and continues to live forever.

Your grief has burned the hearts of men, *jinn* and angels; for you are the source of pain and sorrow for the creatures of earth although you are celestial. How could we not be mindful of you, when you in your compassion under the blade and with your last breath were mindful of our sorrowful plight.

c. 'This *Husayn*, who is he that the entire world is mad with love for him?'

The title is a hypothetical question to which this *marthīyah* is an answer.

This is the *Husayn* whose beloved is the eternal truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and the ocean of infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*) is but the shell of his unique pearl. This is the one who is the candle burning in the chamber of *walāyah* [metaphorically used to refer to the imamate of the *imāms*], the one in whose love the candle of the court (*iwān*) of creation burns like a moth. At times, like the verse of mercy and at other times like the seal of prophethood, he sat on the shoulders of the Prophet. This is the king at the threshold of whose palace the faithful spirit [Gabriel] with multitudes of angels stood as beggars for the whole night. This is the one who in the banquet of purity lost this chess game of fidelity, yet the universal intellect was checkmated by the rook of his regal game. This is the drinker of the wine goblet with whose cry of intoxication the ears of the ninth sphere, from eternity to eternity, are filled. This is the wine drinker whose cup the eternal *sāqī*-cup bearer [i.e., God] has filled with all the pain, sorrow, poison and suffering He had. In this world whosoever is a wandering poor one (*qalandar*), drinker of the wine of purity, drains only the cup of the dregs of his [*Husayn's*] tavern. This is he who has become a legend in the plane of beauty among the people of beauty, the one with whose legend the ears of the heavens are filled. O *Zawqī* [the poet's name] although the mirror of God has no place, yet at times our devastated hearts may be the place wherein it dwells.³⁵

D.2 A *Taʿzīyah Majlis*

The following selections are taken from a recording of a series of live *majālis* given by Sayyid Naṣrallāh, a famous Iraqi *nāʾih* (lamentation

reader). The tape was made from records pressed in Lebanon which are not available here for fuller description. The *majālis* were held, it seems, during the 'Āshūrā' period. While the story of Ḥusayn's journey and the subsequent events of 'Āshūrā' form the core of each *majlis* in chronological order, every *majlis* begins with a picture of Ḥusayn or one of his sons or brothers at the point of death before picking up the story at an intended point. Some dialogue or colloquy is introduced for dramatic effect, and often historical accounts are highly embellished, again to dramatize the event and integrate it into the total panorama of the tragedy. The *majlis* we shall cite here deals with the beginning of the journey from Mecca to Karbalā'. Ḥusayn is informed of the death of Muslim, and a daughter of the latter is introduced to mourn her father with Sukaynah, Ḥusayn's young daughter. The latter first appears in a playful mood, which suddenly changes as she is told the sad news.

The chanter begins the *majlis* with the following set formula:

Peace be upon you, O master, O Apostle of God, the elect of God from among His creatures. Peace be upon you and upon the people of your household, the good and pure ones, the wronged and scattered ones. O Abū 'Abdallāh [Ḥusayn] you who are in a strange land (*gharīb*) would that I were with you that I may achieve great victory.

The *majlis* begins with a moving call for weeping put in the mouth of the martyred *Imām* himself, followed by a response of the community (*Shī'ah*) of the *imāms* affirming its continuous sorrow for the great calamities of *ahl al-bayt*.

O my *Shī'ah*, do not abandon the pilgrimage to my tomb, for frequenting it is the best means of achieving nearness [to God and the *imāms*]. And, whenever you drink cool water remember me, thirsty at the banks of the Euphrates at my death. Pour out for me your tears wherever you may be, for I am the one killed for the shedding of tears and emitting sighs of grief.

The response follows in very colloquial language.

Your followers [*Shī'ah*], O Ḥusayn, offer their tears to you. They weep with hearts burning as if on coals. Your followers (*Shī'ah*)

have abandoned sleep, regarding it as a thing prohibited. How could they sleep on those nights which filled for you their cup of afflictions. Your *Shī'ah*, O Ḥusayn, have donned for you their clothes of mourning. Instead of their garments they rent their hearts. For it was the wish of your *Shī'ah*, O Ḥusayn, to protect you with their hearts [*muhaj*, plural of *muhjah*] from the sharp lances.

The *majlis* goes on to relate Ḥusayn's departure from Mecca in the manner of a colorful traditional Arabian tale. The style is extremely simple and repetitive in order for the participants to absorb fully the atmosphere. The point is heavily stressed that Ḥusayn had no choice but to leave Mecca, even without completing his *hajj*.

They asked him, saying, 'O son of the Apostle of God, what has made you leave in such haste before completing your *hajj*?' He answered, 'I was afraid that the sanctity of this house [the *Ka'bah*] may be violated through me. For the accused Yazīd sent thirty men of satans of the sons of Umayyah and said to them "Kill Ḥusayn even if you find him grasping the veils (*astār*) of the *Ka'bah*.'"'

The death of Muslim is then narrated by two men who heard it from an eyewitness who saw the corpses of Muslim and Hānī b. 'Urwah dragged in the marketplace and saw a crier announcing, 'This is the punishment of anyone opposing the *Amīr* Ibn Ziyād.' Ḥusayn called Muslim's daughter, seated her in his lap and began to pass his hand over her head as was the custom to do with orphans. The narrator adds that the girl, when she heard the news of her father's death, wept not for him but rather for being orphaned yet a second time by the death of Ḥusayn who was like a father to her. The narrator then imagines Sukaynah throwing herself over her father's dead corpse after the battle and crying out, 'O father, when night comes who shall shelter our orphans?' The *majlis* ends with another folk dirge for Ḥusayn, who died thirsty and totally abandoned. The chanter concludes with a few petitions of prayer and salutations of peace to the *Imām*, and a recitation of the *Fātiḥah*, the opening *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, on behalf of the departed souls of the faithful.

D.3 A *Ziyārah* ATTRIBUTED TO THE TWELFTH *Imām* DURING HIS OCCULTATION (*ghaybah*)

The *zīyārah* chosen for this appendix is an important one in many ways. First of all it is attributed to the twelfth *Imām*, the awaited *ḥujjah*, proof or witness of God. Traditionally it is referred to as ‘the *zīyārah* preceding from the sacred quarter (*al-zīyārah al-ātīyah min al-nāḥīyah al-muqaddasah*)’. It is supposed to be performed at the tomb of Ḥusayn on the day of ‘*ʿAshūrā*’. However, Majlisī questions its designation by al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā specifically for that day.³⁶ The text is a masterpiece of Arabic rhetoric. It is in rhymed prose, making it virtually impossible to reproduce in another language without losing much of its power of expression and artistic beauty. Because of its length and repetitiveness, we shall not give an entire translation, but rather choose some parts which in our view express well its major ideas or concepts and summarize the rest. As will be seen, this *zīyārah* tells the whole story of the martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn, and alludes to most of the important hagiographical interpretations that have grown around it. It seems to be of a late authorship (at least fourth century), as it is not included in the earliest standard collection of *zīyārah* texts by Ibn Qawlawayh (*Kāmil al-Zīyārāt*), or any other collection before *al-Mazār al-Kabīr* of al-Murtaḍā. Majlisī, moreover, hints at the possibility that al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā may have been responsible for at least some parts of this *zīyārah*. It is more probable that he was responsible for the entire text as we have it, relying on some older rescension or at least a tradition of such a *zīyārah*.

This *zīyārah* shows in a striking way the continuity of the *imāms* with the ancient prophets. While most *zīyārah* texts asserting this continuity begin with the salutation of peace to the *imāms* as heirs of the prophets, this text begins with the prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad, and goes on to the *imāms*, reciting an epithet for each prophet or *imām* after the salutation. Each sentence addressing a prophet or *imām* begins with ‘*al-salāmu* *ʿalayka yā . . .*’, then the name follows.

Peace be upon you O Adam, the chosen one (*ṣafwah*) of God from among His creatures . . . Peace be upon Seth the friend (*walī*) of God

and his elect one (*khīrah*) . . . Peace be upon Idrīs [Enoch] who rose up to uphold the *ḥujjah* of God. . . . Peace be upon Noah whose prayers were answered by God . . . Peace be upon Hūd, who was aided by God with His own power³⁷. . . . Peace be upon Ṣāliḥ whom God crowned with His favor³⁸. . . . Peace be upon Abraham who was favored by God with His friendship (*khillah*) . . . Peace be upon Ishmael, whom God ransomed with a great sacrificial victim from His paradise³⁹. . . . Peace be upon Isaac in whose progeny God continued the prophethood . . . Peace be upon Jacob to whom God returned his sight by His mercy. . . . Peace be upon Joseph whom God saved from the well by His great power . . . Peace be upon Moses for whom God split the sea by His might . . . Peace be upon Aaron whom God favored with the gift of prophethood⁴⁰. . . . Peace be upon Jethro (*Shu'ayb*) whom God rendered victorious over his community . . . Peace be upon David whom God had forgiven his sin . . . Peace be upon Solomon to whose greatness the *jinn* were subjected⁴¹. . . . Peace be upon Job whom God healed from his disease . . . Peace be upon Jonah (Yūnus), for whom God fulfilled His promise⁴². . . . Peace be upon Ezra ('Uzayr) whom God resuscitated after his long death . . . Peace be upon Zechariah who was patient with his trials (*miḥnah*)⁴³. . . . Peace be upon John the Baptist whom God favored with his martyrdom⁴⁴. . . . Peace be upon Jesus the spirit of God and His word⁴⁵. . . . Peace be upon Muḥammad, the beloved of God and His chosen one (*ṣafwah*).

Then the *zīyārah* addresses the five people of the Holy Family (*ahl al-bayt*): 'Alī as the brother of the Prophet, Fāṭimah, his daughter, Hasan as the vicegerent (*waṣī*) of God and His representative (*khalīfah*). Then at great length the virtues and sufferings of Ḥusayn are recounted, as well as those of his family.

Peace be upon Ḥusayn, who willingly sacrificed his life. He obeyed God in his innermost secret and openly in his actions. Thus God made healing to be in his earth, and the answering of prayers beneath his dome. Peace be upon him in whose progeny God has deposited the imamate.

The spiritual lineage of the *Imām* is here presented as coeval with his physical descent. He is ' . . . the son of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', Khadījah

al-Kubrā [the venerable one], the heavenly lote tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*),⁴⁶ the garden of refuge'.⁴⁷ The *Imām* is then declared to be the son of the holy objects of the *hajj* pilgrimage: the well of Zemen, Şafā and Minā. Addressing the entire family of martyrs, the text goes on,

Peace be upon the loci of God's signs [or proofs (*barāhīn*)], the *imāms* of lordship; those whose garments were stained with blood, whose lips withered with thirst, whose bodies were left naked on the ground, whose blood was shed and whose limbs were cut off. Peace be upon those who were buried without shrouds, who were forced out of their homes; those whose heads were severed from their bodies.

The text then returns to the *Imām* himself. His divine favors and virtues are intermingled with his sorrows and sufferings.

Peace be upon him who was patient, relying only upon God, him who was wronged with no one to lend him support. Peace be upon him whom the Lord of majesty purified, of whom Gabriel boasted in heaven, and with whom Michael played while in the cradle. Peace be upon him whose covenant was revoked, whose sanctity violated and whose blood wrongly shed.

After this all the major events of Karbalā' are mentioned or alluded to in the most moving and powerful language. After recounting the wrongs suffered by the *Imām*, the pilgrim offers his own loyalty and love as he testifies to the *Imām's* uprightness and piety.

I bear witness that you have performed the prayers (*ṣalāt*) and rendered the obligatory alms (*zakāt*) and enjoined men to do good (*ma'rūf*) and dissuaded them from the bad (*munkar*) and acts of treachery (*'udwān*). I bear witness that you obeyed God . . . sought protection in Him and held fast to His rope. Thus you pleased Him, feared Him, were cognizant of Him and answered His call. I bear witness that you established good practices (*sunan*) and extinguished seditions: you called men to the right and made clear the straight paths and struggled in the way of truth, performing the best *jihād*.

The pilgrim attests to the fact that Ḥusayn followed in the footsteps of the Prophet, his grandfather, and executed well the trust from the

imamate which he inherited from his father and brother; that he upheld the pillars of religion, fulfilled the injunctions of the Qur'ān and was a true support of the Muslim community (*ummah*). The *Imām* is depicted as an example of true ascetic detachment from this world, seeking only the next. It is in this attitude of ascetic detachment that his struggle with the Umayyad authorities is depicted.

Thus when tyranny spread its might, and wrongdoing unveiled its face and corruption gathered its followers, you left the sacred precincts (*ḥaram*) of your grandfather and rose up against the wrongdoers.

The *Imām* is shown to have fought not for the sake of power or in rashness, but rather when good counsel, his first recourse, failed and he had no choice but to fight. He of course fought valiantly, wielding the legendary sword of his father 'Alī, *dhū al-ḥiḡār* (the cleaver of vertebrae). Yet his exemplary courage must stand side by side with his agonized sufferings.

. . . Then your forehead showed the signs of death, and your right and left limbs stretched and contracted, each in turn. You cast a hidden glance at your tents, but were occupied with your own pains, unable to show any care for your family and children. Your horse ran to your tents weeping and neighing. When the women saw your mount without a rider and your stirrup empty, they rushed out from their chambers, their hair disheveled over their cheeks, beating their unveiled faces and crying out with woes. . . . They ran to behold your death, while Shimr sat on your chest, putting his sword to your neck with one hand, and grasping with the other your grey beard. . . . Woe therefore to the reprobate rebels, for in killing you they killed the religion of Islām and annulled prayers (*ṣalāt*) and fasting (*ṣīyām*). They abolished the good practices (*ṣunan*) and religious principles (*aḥkām*). They demolished the foundations of faith (*imān*) and distorted the verses of the Qur'ān. Through your loss were lost the cries of *takbīr* [cries of *allāhu akbar*, the call to prayer] and *tahlīl* [cries of Hallelujah], *tahḡīm* and *tahlīl* [principles of prohibition and sanction], and *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl* [the principles of revelation and right exegesis]. After you, change

(*taghyīr*) and distortion (*tabdīl*), atheism (*ilhād*) and annulment (*ta'īl*) [of the principles of religion], whims and going astray, and seditions and falsehoods, appeared.

Having portrayed this grim picture of chaos and complete disintegration of all ideals, the *zīyārah* goes on to show the effect of the tragedy in the heavenly realms.

Angels and prophets offered the Apostle [Muḥammad] their condolences for your death. Your mother the radiant one (*al-Zahrā'*) raised the dirge for you. Hosts of angels came to console your father the prince of the believers, and mourning sessions (*ma'ātim*) were held for you in the highest realms. In grief for you the black-eyed houris beat their faces. For you wept the heavens and all their denizens, the gardens of paradise and their keepers . . . And the seas with their whales . . . For you wept the sacred house and the corner (*maqām*), the sacred stone and the rights of sanctification and release therefrom (*al-ḥill wa-l-iḥrām*).

The *zīyārah* ends with a supplicatory prayer (*du'ā'*).⁴⁸

NOTES TO 'INTRODUCTION'

1. See Qur'ān, II: 156.
2. *GAL(S)*, I: 320; and *GAS*, I: 540. In both works, Kulaynī is spelled Kulīnī. However, *Shī'ī 'ulamā'* generally spell it with a *fathah*, i.e., Kulaynī, relating the author to his native town in Iran, Kulayn. See for instance the discussion of this in the latest edition of *al-Kāfī*, ed. Najm al-Dīn al-Amūlī, with introduction and notes by 'Alī Akbar al-Ghifārī (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 1388 A.H.), p. 3.
3. *GAL*, I: 187; and *GAS*, I: 544–545. In both works, the Iranian spelling, Bābüya, is used.
4. On variation of title see *GAL(S)*, I: 321; and *GAS*, I: 544–545. Both give title as *Kitāb al-Amālī fī'l-Aḥādīth w-al-Akhbār*.
5. *GAL*, I: 188; *GAL(S)*, I: 322; and *GAS*, I: 549–550. In both these works, the full title of the work is *al-Irshād fī Ma'rīfat Ḥujaj Allāh 'alā-l-'Ibād*.
6. *GAL*, I: 142; and *GAS*, I: 323.
7. *GAL*, I: 65; and *GAS*, I: 308. Abū Mikhnaf Lūṭ b. Yahyā al-Azdī.
8. *GAL*, I: 226.
9. *GAL*, I: 144; and *GAS*, I: 332.
10. In favor of the authenticity see al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl* (Tehran: Nashreh Kitāb, n.d.), p. 192. See also Aghā Buzurg Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah ilā Tasānī al-Shī'ah*, I, p. 85 (Maṭba'ah al-Gharī fī al-Najaf, 1355/1936). *GAL*, I: 144; and *GAS*, I: 332. Against this view see the article by Dr. Jawād 'Alī Mashkūr, 'Mawārid Tārikh al-Mas'ūdī', *Sumer*, XX, No. 1–2 (1964).
11. *GAL*, I: 146; and *GAS*, I: 378.
12. *GAL(S)*, I: 711; and *GAS*, I: 13.
13. Neither title nor author appear in *GAS* or *GAL*. For a brief notice on him, see Sayyid Muḥsin Amīn al-'Āmilī, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: al-Inṣāf Press, 1380/1960), XVI: 87–90.
14. *GAL(S)*, I: 623. The title is not mentioned.
15. Ibn Shahrāshūb does not appear in either *GAL* or *GAS*. For listings of his works under different authors, see *GAL(S)*, I: 710.
16. *GAL*, I: 142; and *GAS*, I: 540. This al-Ṭabarī is not to be confused with his namesake the famous historian who died 310/923.
17. *GAL(S)*, II: 573.
18. The edition used in this study is the modern Iranian edition of which volume ten is in two volumes, 44 and 45. Other volumes of this modern edition will be used and indicated in the bibliography and footnotes. A few other sources written within the last 100 years will be used only by way of example to show the full development of an idea or hagiographical account.

19. GAL(S), I: 952; and GAS, I: 544. Death date given in both is 369. The date 367 is given by the editor of the edition of the work used in this study. See bibliography.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1: 'THE HOUSE OF SORROWS'

1. The words *bayt al-aḥzān* occur in many sources and especially in discussions of the sorrows and sufferings of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. Sometimes they occur as the title of a book. On the significance of *bayt al-aḥzān* as a concept, see Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*, Y. Moubarac, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, (1963), I, p. 573 f.
2. While suffering and death must be considered as two separate phenomena, for the purposes of our study they will be considered as closely related events where suffering becomes meaningful through martyrdom.
3. Psalm 23:4, *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).
4. Matthew 5:4, *Ibid.*
5. Qur'ān II: 156. See Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Mac-Millan Company, 1963), I, p. 48. All subsequent quotations from the Qur'ān will be taken from Arberry's translation, but the official modern Egyptian numbering will be observed throughout.
6. A well known Greek liturgical hymn for Easter, which the author has heard chanted many times in Arabic. See *Ṭarīq al-Amān li-Abnā' al-Imān*, compiled and published by Fr. Ibrāhīm 'Arbilī (Beirut: Qulfat Press, 1960), p. 897. See also for the context the entire section, pp. 895f.
7. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (1st ed. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1389/1966), I, pp. 173–174.
8. Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājā, *al-Sunan* (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1373/1954), II: K. 36, Ch. 23, H. 4023.
9. *Ibid.*, H. 4026. See also Muḥammad b. 'Īsā b. Ṣawrah al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'* (Karachi: n.p., n.d.), p. 316.
10. The *Book of 'Alī* (*Kitāb 'Alī*) is mentioned without any further explanation or reference to any particular book. It does not seem that what is meant here is any of the esoteric scrolls attributed to 'Alī like *al-Jafr*, for instance. Cf. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* (edited with a Persian translation by Sayyid Jawād Muṣṭafawī. Tehran: al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah al-Islāmiyyah, Ḥaydarī Press, n.d.), I, pp. 334 f.
11. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, known as Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ilal al-Sharā'i'* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1382/1963), p. 44. Quoted also in a recent book: Muḥammad Bāqir al-Najafī, *al-Dam'ah al-Sākibah* (n.p., n.d.), p. 289.
12. See Qur'ān, LXXXIX: 27, 28.
13. The Qur'ānic verses referred to in the previous sentence do not explicitly express this idea, but they do carry implicitly this interpretation of the *bayt al-aḥzān*.
14. Akḥṭab Khawārizm or al-Muwaffaq al-Khawārizmī, *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn* (Najaf: Muḥammad al-Samāwī, 1367/1947), p. 165.
15. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *al-Jawāhir al-Saniyyah fī*

- al-Aḥādīth al-Qudsīyyah* (Baghdad: al-Nu'mān, 1384/1964), p. 254. The names of the five people of the cloak are derived from the beautiful names of God (*al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*), and this, for the *Shī'ī* Muslims, is a proof of their nearness to God and their place in the community and the world. See also references given in footnote 16. See Qur'ān, II: 37.
16. 'Abdallāh al-Baḥrānī, *Maqṭal al-'Awālim*, Vol. XVI of 'Awālim al-'Ulūm (Tabriz: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah, n.d.), p. 29.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 30. See also Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah, 1384 A.H.), XLIV: 242.
 19. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 243.
 20. Baḥrānī, pp. 2–3. For similar traditions see also 'Āmilī, *Jawāhir*: 212. There are many traditions on the authority of the *imāms* on this idea in al-Kulaynī. We shall again have to return to this view in Chapter 2 when discussing the actual creation and substance of the *imāms*.
 21. John 1:3.
 22. Baḥrānī, p. 29. See also p. 288. There is an increased realism, from the early to the more recent works, in the depiction of a total and concrete relationship between the ancient prophets and the sufferings of the *imāms*. Adam, who is told by the angel of the tragedy of Karbalā', becomes here an actual witness of the event and one of the mourners of its memory.
 23. See Majlisī, XLIV, p. 242. For an interesting interpretation of this and other traditions dealing with the participation of ancient prophets in, and their knowledge of, the tragedy of Karbalā', see Mullā Ākhund Darbandī, *Iksīr al-'Ibādāt fī Asrār al-Shahādāt* (Tehran: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah, 1385/1965), p. 48.
 24. 'Āmilī, *Jawāhir*, pp. 210–211.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
 26. This statement is repeated in many traditions going back to the *imāms*. See, for instance, the many references in Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, Vol. I: K. *al-Ḥujjah*, and Chapter 2 below.
 27. Baḥrānī, p. 29. See also Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 241–242.
 28. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 243. See also Ja'far al-Ṭustarī, *Khaṣā'iṣ al-Ḥusayn wa-Mazāyā al-Mazlūm* (n.p., n.d., lithograph of manuscript, copied 1305/1887), p. 66.
 29. These are the prophets who came with a revelation and law (*sharī'ah*). Traditionally they are five: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, Vol. I, K. *al-Ḥujjah*, p. 267.
 30. See Qur'ān, VI: 76.
 31. Ṭustarī, p. 68.
 32. See Appendices, section A.1a.
 33. See Qur'ān, XXXVII: 103–105.
 34. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 227.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 243. See also Baḥrānī, pp. 29–30.
 36. See Appendices, section A.1b.
 37. Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Qawlawayh al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, ed. Mirzā 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn al-Aminī al-Tabrizī (Najaf: Murtaḍawīyyah Press, 1356/1937): 76. The fifth *Imām* made this statement in answer to the question put to him by the Umayyad Caliph Hishām Ibn 'Abd al-Malik (724–743) who sent for

- him to enquire how the people who were not living in Kūfah knew of the death of 'Alī when he was killed.
38. Massignon, I, pp. 573 f.
 39. Bahrānī, p. 30.
 40. See Appendices, section A.1c.
 41. For Jesus speaking in the cradle, see Qur'ān XIX: 29–33.
 42. For these traditions concerning Ḥusayn, see Chapter 3, p. 86.
 43. Popular Islāmic tradition here confuses Herod the king of Judea or perhaps his antagonist with a Babylonian king, Nabuchid Nasar, to whom *Shī'ī* piety gives the name of *Bakhtnaṣṣar*. See Rashīd al-Dīn Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1376/1965), III, p. 238.
 44. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 237. See also Qur'ān, XIX: 1.
 45. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 235–236.
 46. Muḥammad Ibn al-Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, ed. al-Sayyid Kāzim al-Miyāmawī (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub, 1377), p. 237.
 47. We are told that the Babylonian king who conquered the Jewish kingdom of the murderer of John the Baptist beheaded seventy thousand people over the boiling blood of the Prophet until it calmed down. The *Mahdī* will likewise slay a large number of men in revenge for the blood of Ḥusayn, increasing the number of those slain for the blood of the Prophet seventy times over. On the *Mahdī*'s mission, see Chapter 6, pp. 216 ff.
 48. See Qur'ān, XXXIII: 33.
 49. This tradition occurs in virtually all *ḥadīth* collections, *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī*. For *Sunnī* examples see Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Hibat Allāh Ibn 'Abdallāh Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn 'Asākīr, *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Afandī Badrān (Damascus: Rawḍat al-Shām, 1332/1913) IV, pp. 314–315. It is hardly important to enumerate all the *Shī'ī* sources for this tradition, but see for example: Muḥammad Ibn al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn*, ed. Muḥammad Khurasānī (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press: 1386/1966), pp. 157–158. Also Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-Imāmah* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1369/1949), p. 3. Ṭabarī's version makes the event a special one in that the Prophet planned it and the Qur'ānic verse, which is quoted elsewhere, is omitted.
 50. Khawārizmī, I, p. 165.
 51. This argument is consistently made for all the *imāms* by al-Ṭabarī in his book *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*. Ṭabarī advances it as one of the proofs of the imamate of each *imām* except the twelfth. For a more direct statement, see the long *ḥadīth* attributed to the sixth *Imām* and quoted in Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, pp. 225 ff.
 52. The context of this tradition will be considered in Chapters 5 and 6. Here only the relevant portions will be discussed.
 53. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 255.
 54. *Ibid.*, 259 ff.
 55. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, p. 225.
 56. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, known as Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī aw al-Majālis* (Qumm, al-Ḥikmah Press, 1371/1951), pp. 78–80.
 57. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.
 58. See Appendix A, section II, part a. for portion dealing with Fāṭimah. See also relevant reference in Appendix.

59. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 70–71.
60. It is contained in a *majlis* (memorial service) dated 3 Shawwāl, 367/978, and is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. See *majlis* 24 of *Kitāb al-Amālī au al-Majālis* of Ibn Bābawayh.
61. The dialogue between the Prophet and Fāṭimah repeats the question of Zechariah to Mary as he entered the temple and found her supplied with provisions and her exclamation: 'It is from God'. See Qur'an, III: 37. For the whole tradition, see Khawārizmī, I, p. 58.
62. See Appendix A, section II, part b. This generosity, put in a highly folkloric context, is expressed in a tale which attests at one and the same time to the apostolic mission of Muḥammad and to the magnanimity of his family.
63. For the interpretation of these popular ideas in mystical and gnostic terms, see Massignon, I, pp. 514 ff.
64. See Chapter 5, p. 193. The expression, *sharīk al-Qur'an* is specifically applied to the twelfth *Imām* and, by implication, to all the others. Many *ziyārah* (pilgrimage prayers) contain this expression or general idea. Cf. Ibn Qawlawayh, *passim*.
65. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 49.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 147 ff.
67. This tradition is found in many sources. For references see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III: 147–149; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Najāfī al-Ṭurayhī (otherwise known as al-Fakhrī), *al-Muntakhab fī Jam' al-Marāthī wa-l-Khutab* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, n.d.), pp. 137 ff. (he depends on Ibn Shahrāshūb); Nisābūrī, pp. 160 ff.
68. Qur'an, LXXVI: 8; Arberry, II, p. 315. For the exegesis of this passage see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III: 147–149; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 152–157. *Amālī* is a collection of *majālis*, each one dated as it was held.
69. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 149.
70. Shaykh Ṣadūq is an epithet of Ibn Bābawayh meaning the 'truthful Shaykh'. He was one of the earliest and most trustworthy *Shī'ī* traditionists.
71. *Rummān* is mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the fruits of paradise; LV: 68.
72. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 161 ff.; and Nisābūrī, pp. 160 ff.
73. See Appendix A, section II, part c, for a very vivid expression of this idea, where a thorn tree first blossoms and gives abundant fruit then begins gradually to wither away and finally die with the death of Ḥusayn.
74. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 155.
75. See Majlisī, XLIV, p. 245. Also Ṭurayhī, p. 124.
76. This saying of the Prophet was given as an argument to Fāṭimah by Abū Bakr against her claim for Fadak. For the theological implications of this event, see Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād* (Mashhad: Ja'farī, n.d.), published with a commentary by Jamāl al-Dīn 'Alī Maṣṣūr al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. 'Alī b. al-Muṭaḥhar al-Ḥillī under the title *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, p. 237.
77. See the articles 'Fadak', *EI*², pp. 725–727; and 'Fāṭimah', *EI*², II, pp. 841–850.
78. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 50–51.
79. Qur'an, XCIII: 5; Arberry, II, p. 342.
80. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 119 ff.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 133. See also Khawārizmī, I, p. 85; and Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 11–43.
82. Ṭurayhī, p. 117. Also Khawārizmī, I, p. 86.
83. Khawārizmī, I, p. 86.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

85. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 233.
 86. Qur'ān, XXXIII: 72. See Chapter 2, pp. 58 ff., for a detailed discussion of the interpretation of this verse.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2: 'THE PROOFS OF GOD'

1. *Hujjah*, the singular of the word *hujaj*, could mean argument, proof, or contention. According to *Shī'ism* the *imāms* will be on the Day of Judgment the argument or contention of God against those who rejected His own will and revelation as expressed and embodied in the *imāms*. This will become amply clear in the course of the present discussion. Thus the English rendering, 'proofs', of *hujaj* gives at best a weak sense of what is actually intended.
2. Khawārizmī, I, p. 67. The same tradition goes on to say that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will adorn the throne of God on the Day of Resurrection, appearing like earrings adorning the face of a woman.
3. Qur'ān, II: 117.
4. Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, pp. 225 ff.
5. See in Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, *Kitāb al-Hujjah*, the chapter entitled, 'That they [the *imāms*] are the pillars or foundations (*arkān*) of the earth', p. 278.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 278 ff.
7. The many traditions attributed to the sixth and eighth *Imāms* which appear in most of the major sources with little variation are the best witness to this important and very interesting development. Al-Kulaynī, the first *Shī'ī* traditionist, died in 328/939. This makes him a contemporary of more than one of the four representatives of the twelfth *Imām*, and little removed from the eleventh *Imām*, who died a little over half a century before him, in 260/873.
8. 'Āmilī, *Jawāhir*, p. 212.
9. See Chapter 1, p. 29.
10. The Prophet once was asked where God was before He created the creation and he answered, 'He was in blind obscurity.' This *ḥadīth* appears in much later *Sūfī* literature and perhaps reflects some Qur'ānic ideas. Cf. *SEI*, 'khalk', pp. 242–243.
11. Qur'ān, II: 255.
12. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 233. The section which includes this tradition is appropriately entitled, 'The Creation of the Bodies, Spirits and Hearts of the *Imāms*'. The tradition goes on to say that the followers, *Shī'ah*, of the *imāms* were also created of a special preserved clay lower than that of the *imāms* but of which only prophets were made. See Chapter 1, p. 51, above.
13. See Chapter 1.
14. Qur'ān, XXIV: 35.
15. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 277–278. The translation here used is Arberry, II, pp. 50–51.
16. Fāṭimah is designated as the niche, but she shares in all the characteristics of the *imāms* and is, in fact, one with them.
17. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, known as Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb Ma'ānī al-Akhbār* (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 1379/1959), pp. 108–109. Qur'ān, XXXIII: 72.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
20. See Qur'ān, VII: 172.
21. Ibn Bābawayh, *Ma'ānī*, p. 109.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 110. See also Qur'ān, II: 37.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
25. Genesis 3:18.
26. *Habaṭa* means 'to come down'. The Qur'ān uses it in the imperative addressing Adam and Eve, saying *ihbiṭā minhā*, 'come down from hence' (II: 38). Compare with this the term used in the Arabic translation of Genesis, '*saqaṭa*', which has the sense of falling into something like a trap or a pit.
27. Ibn Bābawayh, *Ma'ānī*, p. 124.
28. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 275.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
30. Qur'ān, III: 32.
31. Qur'ān, IV: 48 and 116.
32. See Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 324–328, and 330–332.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
34. For many variants of this tradition, see Ibn Bābawayh, *Ikmāl al-Dīn wa Itmām al-Ni'mah fī Ithbāt al-Raj'ah*, ed. Muḥammad Mahdī al-Sayyid al-Ḥasan al-Mūsawī al-Khurasānī (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 1389/1970), pp. 300–305.
35. Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 27 ff.
36. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 346–357. In *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, the tradition concerning the *muṣḥaf* of Fāṭimah is related on the authority of the fifth *Imām*, who describes the contents of the first two leaves and declares that it is with the *imāms* and will continue to be until it is delivered to the 'master of the age', the *Mahdī*, who will fulfill all that is in it. (See note 35 above.)
37. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 347. *Jafr* signifies a container either of revelation, perhaps in written form, or of specific items regarded as signs of power or authority.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 347–350.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 349. It is the lot of the *imāms*, except the twelfth, to suffer persecution and martyrdom and not to achieve victory. The twelfth will truly carry the sword, and to him alone will all victory and vengeance belong.
41. Khawārizmī, I, p. 43.
42. See A. A. Fayzee, *A Shī'ite Creed* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 100 ff.
43. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, p. 228. The last phrase is difficult to render in English, but it suggests that these extremists violated either the rights of God by setting up other gods with Him, or the rights of the *imāms* by claiming for them more than was the truth.
44. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 379. It is of some interest, perhaps, to observe that the man who asked the question was a Persian. This of course raises the perplexing issue of the extent to which the whole doctrine of the imamate was influenced by Iranian and other non-Islāmic traditions. This problem, however, falls outside the scope of this study. For the present purpose, we regard *Shī'ī* piety as an integral phenomenon and accept it as such without raising the problem of its sources, important though this problem may be. On this question see the interesting

- article by Toufic Fahd, 'Ja'far Aṣ-Ṣādiq et la tradition scientifique arabe', in *Le Schi'isme Imāmīte*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), pp. 131–143.
45. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 399 ff. See also Kulaynī, *Kāfī* I, pp. 283–293; Abū Maṣū'ir Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Ṭabarsī, *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj* (Najaf: Nu' mān Press, 1386/1966), II, pp. 226 ff.
 46. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 399. See Qur'ān, LVII: 21; Arberry II, p. 261.
 47. Such signs are also claimed for the prophet by general Islāmic piety in proof of his prophethood. See for example Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, 2nd ed. (Hyderabad: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah Press, 1396/1950), pp. 110–111.
 48. See Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 162. This refers to the distinction between a prophet who may see the angel who speaks to him and an *imām* who only hears the angel's voice.
 49. Ṭabarsī, *Iḥtijāj*, p. 230. The last sentence of the text emphasizes that no legal point of the *Sharī'ah* should be beyond the *imām*'s knowledge from the most significant to the smallest offense or indemnity. Thus the *imām* is characterized by his perfect knowledge and justice.
 50. Compare the marks of the Buddha and special characteristics of the Boddhisatva in Indian and Far Eastern traditions, the perfect man of Iranian religion and his counterpart in the Son of Man in post-Biblical Judaism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3: 'THE MASTER OF THE YOUTHS OF PARADISE'

1. *Sayyid shabāb ahl al-jannah* is applied to both brothers, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, by the Prophet and appears in all sources dealing with their lives. See for example note 4 below.
2. It may be argued that the twelfth *Imām*, as he embodies in himself all the preceding *imāms* and even prophets, and consummates their mission, occupies the highest position of them all. See Chapter 6.
3. Khawārizmī, I, p. 144.
4. See for example, Mufīd: p. 180, and Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 153; and for a thorough discussion by a *Sunnī* author, see Ibn 'Asākir, IV, p. 314.
5. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 153.
6. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 175; and 'Alī al-Faḍl Ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Kitāb I'lām al-Wara bi-A'lām al-Huda* (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-'Ilmīyyah al-Islāmīyyah, 1338/1919), p. 215. See also note 56 below.
7. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 179.
8. Qur'ān XLVI: 15. The verse reads as follows: '... his mother bore him painfully, and painfully she gave birth to him; his bearing and his weaning are thirty months. Until, when he is fully grown, and reaches forty years, he says, "O my Lord, dispose me that I may be thankful for Thy blessing wherewith Thou hast blessed me and my father and mother, and that I may do righteousness well-pleasing to Thee; and make me righteous also in my seed."' Arberry, II, pp. 216–217.
9. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 56–57. See also Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I: p. 363.

10. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan al-Mas‘ūdī al-Dihlī, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah li’l-Imām ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib*, 4th ed. (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1374/1954). See also Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 363.
11. Mas‘ūdī, *Ithbāt*, pp. 160 ff.
12. Such sagas are quite common in the Muslim world and are recited as *Mawālīd* on many occasions. For an example in English see Suleyman Çelebi, *Mevlid-i Şerif*, trans. F. Lyman MacCullum (London: John Murray, 1943). It is interesting here that the relatively late work of Baḥrānī has attained classical status for many modern writers, who grant it the same prestige and claim to authenticity as the oldest and most trustworthy works on the subject.
13. Baḥrānī, p. 3.
14. The Arabic word *ruqyah* is a spell or incantation to protect someone against some evil force or spirit. This is done by old pious men or women, normally over a child who has been scared by something or suspected of being struck with the evil eye. The two *sūrah*s of refuge (the last two *sūrah*s of the Qur‘ān) are usually used in the *ruqyah* formula, and usually the man or woman performing this *ruqyah* blows in the face of the person for whom it is performed.
15. Baḥrānī, pp. 3–4.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. Qur‘ān, XXVI: 214.
18. This tradition, with many variants, occurs in most *Shī‘ī ḥadīth* collections and theological treatises in proof of the imamate of ‘Alī and his descendants. See, for a long version of this tradition Khawārizmī, I, p. 50; and for a *Shī‘ī* theological statement, Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, pp. 247–248.
19. Mufīd, pp. 179–190.
20. *Shī‘ī* tradition asserts that the *waṣī* of Moses the prophet was his brother Aaron, and that God continued the prophetic line in the latter’s progeny. Therefore, ‘Alī, in whose line the imamate was deposited, continues that prophetic cycle in the line of the *imāms*. See note 21 below.
21. See Henri Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), Ch. 2; and Sayyid Ḥaydar Amulī, *Jāmi‘ al-Asrār* Tehran: Franco-Iranian Institute of Research, 1347/1969), pp. 241–242.
22. Qur‘ān, XVII: 33; Arberrry, I, pp. 305–306.
23. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 206.
24. Other dates are given by *Shī‘ī* writers, but this one seems to be the date generally agreed upon by all trustworthy authorities. See Mufīd, p. 180. See also Shaykh Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Amālī*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-‘Ulūm (Baghdad: al-Maktabah al-Ahliyyah, 1384/1964), I, pp. 377–378, among many other sources. See also Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 81.
25. *El²*, I, ‘*Aqīqah*’.
26. See Nisābūrī, p. 164, where Umm Ayman is mentioned. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 226 ff.; and Raḍī al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. Ṭāwūs al-Baghdādī, *al-Luhūf ‘alā Qatla al-Ṭufūf*, 2nd ed. (Ṣayda: al-‘Irfān Press, 1347/1929), p. 10.
27. Darbandī, pp. 94 ff.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 95. This is supposed to be a tree in paradise, the tree of beatitude (*shajarat ṭūbā*), which is mentioned in many popular sources relating the marriage of ‘Alī and Fāṭimah, and the birth of their children.

29. Nīsābūrī, p. 154.
30. An interesting source for this tradition is Ibn 'Asākir in his *al-Tārikh al-Kabīr*, p. 314. Ibn 'Asākir was a well known *Sunnī* author with definite anti-*Shī'ī* sentiments. He relates the tradition on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, the famous authority of *Sunnī ḥadīth*.
31. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 209.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
34. This highly idiomatic expression popularly means as dear or precious as the skin between the two eyes.
35. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 67.
36. The name of this angel seems to be derived from the Arabic name for Peter, Buṭrus. No other connection between the angel and the Apostle is anywhere suggested.
37. This story is told with many variations regarding both the name of the angel, and the reason for his punishment. For early sources, see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 229; and Nīsābūrī, p. 155. The story is told in almost all books dealing with the life of the *Imām*. In later sources, however, three angels are given. See Baḥrānī, pp. 5–6. See also Darbandī, pp. 94 ff.
38. Baḥrānī, p. 25.
39. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 229.
40. See Ṭurayhī, pp. 61 ff. See also Darbandī, p. 98.
41. The bearers of the throne resembling the various animals were there to intercede with God, each one for the animal species which he resembles. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 230.
42. Khawārizmī, I, p. 158. The author adds that there was not an angel who did not descend to the Prophet to console him on the impending tragedy. See also Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 9–10.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
46. Mufīd, p. 180.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
49. Qur'ān, III: 61. The verse reads, 'Come now, let us call our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives, our selves and your selves, then let us humbly pray and so lay God's curse upon the ones who lie.' Arberry, I, p. 82.
50. For an interesting analysis of the *mubāhalah* with regard to Fāṭimah and the Holy Family, see Massignon, *Opera Minora*, I, p. 550. See among many *Shī'ī* sources Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 151 ff.; Mufīd, p. 181; and Nīsābūrī, pp. 156 ff.
51. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 143–144.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 143–147.
53. For a good example of such legends, see Khawārizmī, I, pp. 144 ff.
54. Nīsābūrī, p. 158.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
56. See, for example, the two sections in Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 153 ff., on 'the love of the Prophet for them', and 'some examples of their virtues'.
57. See, for example, Ṭurayhī, pp. 252–253.

58. See Majlisī, XLV, p. 150, for his sources.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 150. For a further embellishment, see Ṭurayḥī, p. 64, and Darbandī, p. 526.
60. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 234; and Ṭurayḥī, p. 51. Ṭurayḥī omits Māriyah, the mother of Ibrahīm, from his story and emphasizes the love of the Prophet for Ḥusayn as the main motif.
61. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 161.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
63. Khawārizmī, I, p. 146.
64. See Chapter 2, *passim*.
65. Ṭabarsī, *I'lām*, p. 215. See also Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 69–72.
66. The last words of this sentence indicate the function of the *imām*, here both a teacher and a savior. The word *mushkilāt* refers to hardships, problems and insurmountable difficulties. See Ṭabarsī, *I'lām*, p. 159; and note 7 above.
67. Reference here is to the throne of Bilqīs, Queen of Sheba. See Qur'ān, XXVII: 23–44.
68. Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 180–181. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 211.
69. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 211.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
71. For this and other miracles attributed to Ḥusayn see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 209–211; and Majlisī, XLV, pp. 180 ff.
72. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 209.
73. The prayer known as *Ṣalāt al-Istisqā'* is a common practice in Islām, going back to the Prophet.
74. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 188.
75. Ṭabarsī, *Dalā'il*, p. 73. The greatest miracles attributed to the *Imām* are those related to his martyrdom. These, more than any others, are meant to show his special status with God and voluntary self-sacrifice in His way. For the *Shī'īs*, they prove beyond doubt his claim to the imamate. We shall deal later with a few of these.
76. Khawārizmī, I, pp. 155–156.
77. Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mālikī al-Makkī (known as Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh), *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah fī Ma'rifat al-A'immaḥ* (Tehran: n.p., 1333 A.H.), p. 183. See also Qur'ān, IV: 86.
78. All three citations are from Qur'ān, III: 134; Arberry, I, p. 90.
79. See Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, pp. 183–184.
80. 'Abdallāh al-'Alā'īlī, *al-Imām al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār Maktabah al-Tarbīyah, 1972), p. 327.
81. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 211; Majlisī, XLIV, p. 190; and Yūsuf b. Firghālī Ibn 'Abdallāh al-Baghdādī Sibṭ Abī al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī al-Ḥanafī, *Tadhkirāt al-Khawāṣ*, otherwise known as *Tadhkirāt Khawāṣ al-Ummaḥ fī Khaṣā'iṣ al-A'immaḥ*, ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 1383/1964), p. 254.
82. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 223.
83. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, p. 185.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 185. See also Appendix B for fuller texts of Ḥusayn's sayings.
85. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. and tr. S. M. Stern (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), I, pp. 11 ff.
86. Ibn 'Asākir, IV, p. 323.

87. For an interesting episode between Ḥusayn and Mu'āwiyah and the latter's son Yazīd, over the beautiful woman Uraynab, illustrating further Ḥusayn's gallantry and generosity, see Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Muslim b. Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Imāmah w-al-Siyāsah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1377/1957), I: 193–202. This is otherwise known as *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (History of the Caliphs).
88. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 255; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Ma'ānī*, p. 188.
89. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 210; and Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 83–84.
90. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 376, 379, 383.
91. An exception to this is the argument made by al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā in his *Tanzīh al-Anbiyā'* (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 2nd ed., 1388/1968), pp. 221 ff., where he insists that Ḥusayn went to Iraq on the promise of support, and did not know the consequences of his action. This view, however, has received much criticism from many writers. A modern example is Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amin al-Āmilī in his work *Lawā'ij al-Ashjān fī Maqal al-Imām Abī 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn* (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 1381/1962), p. 221.
92. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 162.
93. Ibn 'Asākir, in his *Tārīkh*, relates a few of the traditions concerning Umm Salamah's prior knowledge of the death of Ḥusayn and the turning of the soil she kept into blood on the day he died, but he questions the veracity of such traditions as he states on the authority of al-Wāqidī that she died three years before the death of Ḥusayn. See IV, p. 314.
94. 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah fī Ma'rifaṭ al-A'imma* (Iran: n.p., 687/1288), p. 204.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 204. See also Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 33–34.
96. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 34. See also 'Abd al-Razzāq Mūsawī, *Maqal al-Ḥusayn aw Ḥadīth Karbalā'* (Najaf: Najaf Press, 1383/1963), p. 56.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4: 'THE WRONGED MARTYR'

1. The two epithets, martyr (*shahīd*) and wronged one (*mazlūm*), occur both separately and together as one. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 232, for other such names and epithets.
2. See the treatment of Ḥusayn's death in *SEI*, 'al-Ḥusain', p. 142.
3. *Saqīyah* is a shelter or roofed space where apparently important tribal meetings in early Arabia were held. The reference here is to the *saqīyah* of Banī Sā'idah, where 'Alī was passed over in favor of Abū Bakr as caliph. During my stay in Iran, I often heard this statement made and expanded upon by the '*ulamā'* in public orations. See also Ṭurayhī, p. 4.
4. This point is stressed by all Muslim sources on Ḥusayn. See, for instance, the statements attributed to him in Ṭabarī, quoted below in this chapter.
5. Ibn Ṣabbāgh, p. 189. This statement was reported on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf, who is one main source for Ḥusayn's revolt and death.
6. Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb b. Ja'far b. Wahb al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 1384/1964), II, p. 216.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
8. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 87 ff. There the will of Mu'āwīyah is reported as a part of the martyrdom story on the authority of the sixth *Imām*, al-Ṣādiq.
9. Khawārizmī, I, pp. 175–176. For other *Sunnī* sources see Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 235; and Abū Hanīfah Aḥmad b. Dāwūd al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl*, 1st ed., ed. Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Rāqī'ī (Cairo: n.p. 1330/1911), p. 228.
10. Khawārizmī, I, p. 176.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 176; Ya'qūbī, II, p. 217; and Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 235.
12. Khawārizmī, I, p. 180; Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam w-al-Mulūk* (Cairo: Ḥusayniyyah Press, first ed., n.d.), VI, p. 188; see Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 310–312, for his sources.
13. This conversation between al-Ḥusayn and al-Walīd is reported with several variants. See, for example: Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 14; al-Dīnawarī, p. 228; and Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 189.
14. Khawārizmī, I, p. 184.
15. Mufīd, p. 182.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
17. This verse of the Qur'ān (II: 156) is usually recited at the news of death or great calamity.
18. Khawārizmī, I, p. 186.
19. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 191.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
21. Khawārizmī, as a *Sunnī* author, adds 'and the rightly guided caliphs', I, pp. 188–189.
22. Mufīd, pp. 182–183; Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 329–330.
23. Ṭabarsī, *I'lām*, p. 221; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 199; Mufīd, p. 182. For the first date, see Khawārizmī, I, p. 189. For an alternate date, see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 14.
24. Qur'ān, XXVIII: 21 and 22; Arberry, II, p. 88. See Mufīd, p. 184; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 193; and Nisābūrī, p. 171.
25. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 217; and Mufīd, p. 200.
26. The story of Muslim is dramatically related in Ṭabarī, where all various reports are given; see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 194; and Mufīd, pp. 186 ff.
27. Sa'd, 'Umar's father, was one of the closest companions of the Prophet; see Chapter 1, p. 25.
28. For a good account of Ibn Ziyād's career and character, and the traditions dealing with his parentage, see Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *al-Fitnah al-Kubrā*, II, 'Alī wa Banū (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1966), pp. 204–206.
29. See the previous note. For Ḥusayn's view, which became the traditional *Shī'ī* view, see Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, II, p. 20.
30. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 28; Ṭabarsī, *I'lām*, p. 223.
31. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 196–198; Mufīd, pp. 185–186.
32. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 19. For other letters see pp. 15–19.
33. Mufīd, p. 186; and the previous note.
34. Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 238. 'If you do not come you will be a transgressor (*āthim*).'
35. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 231. Also see below in this chapter.
36. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 231; Ṭabarsī, *I'lām*, p. 223. For an interesting variant see Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Abī al-Baqā' Hibat Allāh b. Namā al-Ḥillī, *Muthīr al-Aḥzān* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1369/1950), pp. 29–30.

37. See the previous note.
38. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 204–206.
39. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 35–37. Ibn Ṭāwūs offers yet another reason for Ḥusayn to take his women with him. If he had left them behind, Yazīd would have taken them and Ḥusayn's struggle would have been for their freedom rather than for the *jihād* against Yazīd. See also his discussion on p. 47.
40. The leech is metaphorically used to denote his declaration of *bay'ah* to Yazīd, which stuck in his throat like a leech and like a leech was to suck out his blood.
41. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 223. Ṭabarī reports this tradition on the authority of Ibn Sa'd, the famous biographer of the Prophet and his companions.
42. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 217; and Mufīd, p. 201.
43. Hillī, p. 33; Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 39.
44. Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 275. This correspondence between Yazīd and Ibn 'Abbās is reported on the authority of al-Ḥāqidi. That Ḥusayn actually attributed his reason for going to Iraq to a divine command of some sort, is a fact reported by most of our sources, even the early ones. Ṭabarī's own source, for example, Abū Mikhnaf, relied on eyewitness reports for many of his traditions. We cannot therefore explain away this motive altogether by assigning it to later pious exaggerations: the traditions asserting it are too early and widespread. These traditions themselves have also acquired accretions, as we shall see.
45. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 219; Mufīd, p. 203. For a slightly different version see Khawārizmī, I, p. 217.
46. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 202 ff. According to Ṭabarī, Muslim was killed on the same day Ḥusayn left Mecca, so he could not have known of his death until he was well on his way. See also Mufīd, pp. 197 ff.
47. Mufīd, p. 196.
48. See, for example, the smallest and most widely accepted number in Mufīd, p. 216. For the second estimate see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 220. For still a larger estimate see Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, n.d.), III, p. 56.
49. According to some traditions, the messenger was Qays b. Maṣhar al-Ṣaydāwī. See Mufīd, p. 203; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 224.
50. Qur'ān XXXIII: 23. Arberry, II, p. 123.
51. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 229–230.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
53. Mufīd, p. 207.
54. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 229.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
56. Mufīd, p. 209; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 236; for variants and lexical explanations, see Majlisī, p. 193.
57. Mufīd, p. 204.
58. Khawārizmī, I, p. 237. See also Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 231; and Mufīd, pp. 204–205, for different versions.
59. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 45.
60. Mufīd, p. 210.
61. There seem to have been at least two communications between Ibn Ziyād and Ibn Sa'd, and this seems to be the first one. See Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 234; and Mufīd, p. 212.

62. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 235.
63. For a full text of Ibn Sa'd's letter to Ibn Ziyād giving these choices, see Mufīd, p. 212. The author does not question the statement of Ḥusayn giving the three alternatives here cited.
64. For modern examples, see 'Āmilī, *Lawā'ij*, p. 101, and especially pp. 219–224; and Mūsawī, *Ḥadīth Karbalā'*: pp. 232 ff. For an interesting and sober analysis of the entire episode and especially of the present point, see Muḥammad Maḥdī Shams al-Dīn, *Ṭhawrat al-Ḥusayn Ḥurūfuhā al-Ijtimā'iyyah wa-Āthāruhā al-Insāniyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, n.d.), pp. 102 ff., and *passim*. For a *Sunnī* analysis, see 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *Abū al-Shuhadā' al-Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, n.d.), p. 94.
65. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, III, p. 235.
66. Mufīd, p. 213; Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 226.
67. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, III, p. 236.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 234; and al-Ḥillī, p. 35.
69. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 238; and Nīsābūrī, p. 183.
70. Mufīd, p. 215.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
72. These verses are reported in all the main sources. See, for instance, Mufīd, p. 216; Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 239; and Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣakar (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1949), p. 113.
73. Mufīd, p. 216. See also the previous note.
74. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 240. The *qaṭa* is a bird usually hunted at night; therefore it never sleeps at night.
75. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 241.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 241. See also Mufīd, p. 216.
77. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 243; Mufīd, p. 217.
78. An attempted prayer performed in time of war or other catastrophes.
79. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 246.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
81. Qur'ān, XXXIII: 23; Arberry, I, p. 123.
82. Mufīd, p. 221.
83. His name has been variously reported as Ibn As'ad al-Shabāmī or the name here given, which is generally accepted. See Khawārizmī, II, p. 16; and Mufīd, p. 222. For his role in extremist *Shi'ī* ideas, see Majlisī, XLIV, p. 277; and below in this chapter.
84. Qur'ān, XL: 30–31; Arberry, II, p. 178.
85. Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, II, p. 254; Mufīd, p. 222.
86. The Qur'ān does not enter into the details of crucifixion. See, however, Qur'ān, IV: 157.
87. See Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ*, VI, p. 246; Mufīd, p. 220; Khawārizmī, I, p. 249; and Nīsābūrī, p. 185.
88. Around this infant has grown an elaborate legend. According to Ya'qūbī, for instance, a very early source, he was born at the same hour in which his father wished to see him. Ya'qūbī, II, p. 233.
89. Ḥillī, p. 56; Ibn Ṭāwūs, pp. 55–56, Sayyid Muḥammad Maḥdī Ibn al-Sayyid Ja'far al-Mūsawī, *Riyāq al-Maṣā'ib* (1243 A.H.). This last book is in manuscript form in the author's collection.

90. See previous note.
91. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 257; Mufīd, p. 225.
92. Mufīd, p. 224.
93. See, for example, Khawārizmī, I, p. 242; Mūsawī, *Ḥadīth Karbalā'*, p. 252. The latter source, echoing many earlier traditions, almost makes al-'Abbās a divine hero. See especially his poem cited there.
94. Ibn Shahrāshūb, who must be regarded as an important popular source, argues that Ḥusayn killed close to 2000 men. See *Manāqib*, III, pp. 246 ff. Even in this rather lengthy sketch, it has been necessary to omit much that belongs to both the historical and the hagiographical accounts. For a fairly complete presentation of actual *maqāt* materials in European languages, see *Der Tod des Husein ben'Ali und die Rache, ein historischen Roman aus dem Arabischen* (tr. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1883).
95. I have heard of, but have not myself seen, the work in which a prominent Indian *Shī'ī 'ālim*, 'Alī Naqī, argues for the fictitious character of this man. But in our brief conversation at Aligarh in India, he said nothing to suggest this opinion.
96. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 259; Mufīd, p. 226.
97. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 260.
98. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 260–261; Mufīd, p. 225. See also Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 99. Here we read on the authority of the fifth *Imām* that there were found on Ḥusayn's body over 120 stabs and strikes, all in his breast because he would not turn to run away.
99. Mufīd, p. 225.
100. Khawārizmī, II, p. 31. See also Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 65.
101. Khawārizmī, II, p. 32.
102. Mufīd, p. 227.
103. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 260; Mufīd, p. 227. Mufīd relates that Yazīd came to cut off the head but his hands trembled. So Shimr did it and gave the head to him to carry to Ibn Sa'd and later to Ibn Ziyād.
104. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 262.
105. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 115. Majlisī even puts in her mouth a moving dirge in the form of a long poem which will be discussed in the next chapter.
106. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 262. See also Mufīd, p. 228.
107. Matthew 27: 46.
108. Matthew 26: 53.
109. Fortunatus in Rev. Joseph Connelly, M.A., *Hymns of the Roman Liturgy* (Westminster, Maryland: Newnam Press, 1954), Hymn 52, pp. 80–82.
110. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 191; Khawārizmī, I, p. 187.
111. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 238; note also his sources.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 238; Khawārizmī, I, p. 188.
113. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, p. 386.
114. Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 72.
115. Darbandī, p. 396.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
117. Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 74.
118. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 131. Ibn Ṭāwūs quotes this tradition from *Kitāb al-Majālis* by al-Mufīd, who is regarded as a very sober traditionist.
119. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 11.

120. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 216. See also Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 88, where the scroll (*ṣahīfah*) of Ḥusayn is specifically mentioned.
121. For an interesting comparison between the martyrs of the two battles, see Mūsawī, *Ḥadīth Karbalā'*, pp. 56 ff.
122. Qur'ān, IX, 40.
123. Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 57; see also Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 88.
124. Ṭālūt is mentioned in the Qur'ān as the old Hebrew king-prophet, perhaps Saul who killed Goliath. See Qur'ān, II: 247.
125. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 163.
126. Mūsawī, *Ḥadīth Karbalā'*, p. 52.
127. See the tradition in Ibn Bābawayh, '*Ilal*', attributed to the sixth *Imām*, p. 229.
128. Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 77.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 77. We shall return to this tradition again in Chapter 6.
130. Darbandī, p. 394.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
132. Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 56; and Nisābūrī, p. 189.
133. The story of Ḥusayn's horse is told with many variants in very early sources. The late tradition just cited is reported in Muḥammad Bāqir b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Najafī, *al-Dam'ah al-Sākibah* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 346–347, in which the author claims to have taken the tradition from an old copy of al-Mufīd's *Irshād*.
134. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 98, for an early source. See also Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 318 ff. For a popular modern source, see Mūsawī. *Riyād*, p. 329–331.
135. Mūsawī, *Riyād*, p. 331.
136. Mufīd, p. 225; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 260; Ibn 'Asākir, IV, pp. 338–340.
137. The story of the camel driver seems to have grown out of an earlier tradition concerning Ḥusayn's trousers. It bears similarity to several other tales. See, for instance, Khawārizmī, II, p. 124.
138. Ṭurayhī, p. 473.
139. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 261.
140. These verses occur in some of the earliest sources. See Iṣfahānī, p. 120; and Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 261.
141. This and other speeches attributed to her are masterpieces of rhetoric. For sources and variants as well as lexical explanations, see Majlisī, XLV, pp. 148–150.
142. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 264; Mufīd, p. 231; Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 100. He relates the incident on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf.
143. Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 104.
144. Majlisī, XLV, p. 137. He reports this version from a book written by one of his contemporaries.
145. *Ibid.*, pp. 137 ff. Several earlier examples are cited. Also see Nisābūrī, pp. 189 ff.; and Khawārizmī, II, pp. 69 ff.
146. See Chapter 3, pp. 81–82.
147. Majlisī, XLV, pp. 139 ff.; Darbandī, p. 526.
148. Ibn Qutaybah, I, pp. 290 ff.
149. Majlisī, XLV, p. 195. For the general idea of the punishment of the murderers of Ḥusayn, see also Majlisī, XLIV, p. 299; and Khawārizmī, II, pp. 86 ff. This tradition is very popular; I have heard it since my childhood.
150. Majlisī, XLV, p. 196.

151. See Khawārizmī, II, p. 38; Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 221; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 100–101. See also Chapter 5.
152. See the previous note, and also Ibrahīm al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Maḥāsīn w-al-Masāwi'* (Cairo: Nahdat Miṣr, n.d.), I, pp. 97 ff.
153. For different versions of her speech and lexical explanation, see Majlisī, XLV, pp. 107 ff.
154. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 262; Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, pp. 90–91.
155. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 223. For a popular tradition, see Ibn Bābawayh, *'Ilal*, p. 228. See Chapter 5.
156. Ibn Bābawayh, *'Ilal*, p. 228. See also Khawārizmī, II, p. 84. We shall return to the weeping of all things for Ḥusayn, an important motif in the Muḥarram cultus, in the next chapter.
157. Khawārizmī, II, p. 92; and Majlisī, XLV, p. 171.
158. Khawārizmī, II, p. 92.
159. For a variety of traditions on this theme, see Majlisī, XLV, pp. 188 ff.
160. Majlisī, XLV, p. 192.
161. For several traditions on the head of Ḥusayn, see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 212–217; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, pp. 261–262; Majlisī, XLV, pp. 146–147.
162. Qur'ān, XVIII: 9; Arberry, I, p. 316.
163. See note 161, above.
164. For this genre of tales, see Majlisī, XLV, pp. 181–183.
165. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
166. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
167. Qur'ān, XIV: 42, and XXVI: 227; Arberry, I, p. 279, and II, p. 75.
168. Majlisī, XLV, p. 138; and Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 217.
169. Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 98.
170. See Quṭb al-Dīn Sa'īd b. Hibatallāh al-Rāwandī, *Kitāb al-Kharā'ij w-al-Jarāih* (Tabriz: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah, 1305 A.H.), p. 228.
171. See the treatment of Ḥusayn's life and martyrdom in Shams al-Dīn, where this point is stressed throughout the work.
172. Darbandī, pp. 465 ff. This view has some support in very early *Shi'ī* tradition. See Chapter 2 above on the creation of the *imāms* and their substance, and below in this chapter.
173. See Appendix C.
174. Ibn Bābawayh, *'Ilal*, p. 227; *Amālī*, p. 87.
175. Ibn Bābawayh, *'Ilal*, p. 227. The *mufawwiḍah* were those who held that God created the world and delegated its affairs and sustenance to 'Alī.
176. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 271; Ṭabarī, *Ihtijāj*, II, p. 20.
177. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 324 ff. This source declares that three days after the death of an *imām* or prophet his body is taken up to heaven, so nothing is found in his tomb.
178. *Ibid.*, pp. 324 ff.
179. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 223.
180. Majlisī, XLV, p. 124, for his sources and variants of the tradition.
181. Mufīd, pp. 229–230.
182. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 264.
183. The reference here is to a *Shi'ī* assertion that Ḥasan was poisoned by his wife at the instigation of Mu'āwiyah. See, for instance, Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 67 ff.

184. Ibn Ṭāwūs, p. 14; Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 71.
 185. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 254–255. This tradition is reported on the authority of the Prophet.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5: 'THE SIGH OF THE SORROWFUL'

1. This phrase is part of a very important *ḥadīth* attributed to the sixth *Imām*, Ja'far al-Šādiq, which will be discussed below. It is also used as the title of a book dealing with the Muḥarram traditions by the late Iranian traditionist 'Abbās Ibn Muḥammad Riḍā al-Qummī: *Nafas al-mahmūm fī maqāt al-Ḥusayn al-Mazlūm* (n.p., n.d., completed in 1335/1916).
2. 'Āmilī, *Lawā'ij*, p. 221.
3. Note for example the phrase in the *Shīrī adhān* (call to prayer), 'Hasten ye to the best of action (*ḥayyī 'alā khayr al-'amal*)', which is taken to be *jihād*.
4. Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 115.
5. See for instance the heading in Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Ibn Bābawayh, *Kitāb thawāb al-a'māl wa 'iqāb al-a'māl* (Baghdad: Asad Press, 1385/1962), p. 75, which reads '*thawāb man baka 'alā al-Ḥusayn*'. For a collection of such traditions, see Majlisī, XLIV, p. 278, and below in this chapter.
6. Ibn Qawlawayh: p. 73. See also Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 116.
7. Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 116.
8. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 278. This *ḥadīth* occurs in many variants. Consult Majlisī for his sources.
9. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 45. See also Majlisī, XLIV, p. 281.
10. Khawārizmī, II, p. 128; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 85–86.
11. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 85–86. The fourth *Imām*'s weeping is directly linked to the weeping and sorrows of earlier prophets. See for instance in the same work, p. 78; and Majlisī, XLVI, p. 209, for other sources.
12. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 82.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.
14. The reference here is to the tradition asserting that the heavens rained blood at the death of Ḥusayn; the rest of this statement also refers to such portents.
15. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 80. For an interesting variant, see Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 54.
16. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 81.
17. Qur'ān, III: 38; Arberry, I, p. 78.
18. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 78.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 78. See also Majlisī, LXIV, pp. 285–286.
21. No one can deny the far-reaching significance of these three main rituals to the entire Muslim community. But we wish to argue here that the special rituals of the *Shīrī* community, the rituals of the *ta'ziyah* and *ziyārah*, present an intensity of feeling and a total encompassing of time and space unparalleled in the general piety of *Sunnī* Islām. In this sense, *Shīrī* ritual gives *Shīrī* piety a unique character in Islāmic religiosity.
22. Najafī, p. 298. This is a recent work, and the author does not give his source for this tradition. He gives a number for the sons of Hāshim, killed with Ḥusayn, at

variance with most other sources which mention 17 or 18. Cf. the tradition of the eighth *Imām* with Ibn Shabīb just discussed.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
24. See Chapter 1, p. 38.
25. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 265.
26. For a *Sunnī* example of this tradition, see Khawārizmī, II, pp. 1 ff.
27. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, p. 228.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 228; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 77–78. See *ʿIlal*, p. 227, for still another view of the popular *ʿAshūrā* piety attributed to the sixth *Imām*. It is there asserted that men actually fabricated special *ḥadīths* claiming the day of *ʿAshūrā* to be a day of blessing for Yazīd in quest of material rewards.
29. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, p. 227.
30. On the subsequent burial of Ḥusayn, see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, VI, p. 26; and Mufīd, p. 227.
31. Yaʿqūbī, II, pp. 231–232. See also the early tradition reported on the authority of the sixth *Imām* which is integrated directly into the drama of Karbalāʾ in Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 337, and Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 100–101.
32. On this questionable tradition is based *zīyārat al-arbaʿin* (the *zīyārah* 40 days after *ʿAshūrā*). See Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 109–110. For a critical view see Majlisī, CI, p. 130 (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah, 1389 A.H.). (Volume XXII of the old edition deals with *zīyārah*; Volumes CI and CII of the modern edition.)
33. In an early tradition attributed to the sixth *Imām*, he said, 'It has reached me that people come to Ḥusayn from the neighborhood of Kūfah, and men and women of other places, to chant dirges for him in mid-Shaʿbān. There would be those who read *maqātil* (martyrdom narratives); others recounting [the story of Ḥusayn's martyrdom]; others chanting dirges (*nadb*); and still others reciting elegies (*marāthī*).' Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 325–326. The author died in 367/977; thus it can be safely inferred that by the early decades of the fourth century, at any rate, the *taʿzīyah* celebration had assumed its permanent character.
34. Many *Shīʿī* pietistic traditions recount the attempts of al-Mutawakkil to efface all traces of the sacred tomb, but it is always miraculously preserved. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 221 ff.; and Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, pp. 330 ff. For the history of the shrine, see ʿĀmilī, *Aʿyān*, IV, pt. I, pp. 183–207.
35. Al-Qummī, p. 226. See also Muḥammad ʿAlī Hibat al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Shahrastānī, *Nahḍat al-Ḥusayn*, 5th ed., Publications of Rābiṭat al-Nashr al-Islāmi (Karbalāʾ: al-Taḍāmun Press, 1969), pp. 149 ff. See the sources used by both authors.
36. Shahrastānī, pp. 159–160. Examples of the *maqātil* used are *al-Luhūf* of Ibn Ṭāwūs and *Muthīr al-Aḥzān* of Ibn Namā al-Ḥillī. See the introduction to this study.
37. Shahrastānī, p. 160.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161.
39. For examples of this genre of literature, see *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husayn*, collected from oral tradition by Sir Lewis Pelly, revised with notes by Arthur M. Williston (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1879), in two volumes. The work consists of 52 scenes presenting the entire cycle of the Muḥarram drama. See especially II, p. 81, for scenes dealing with martyrdom. See also C. Virolleaud, *Le Théâtre Persan ou le drame du Kerbala* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et de l'Orient, 1950).

40. Ṭurayhī, p. 141.
41. Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, p. 76. The other tradition similar to this one is discussed in the same context. See also Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 278 ff.
42. Persian poetry has dedicated much of its great genius to the memory of the martyred *Imām*. It will not be possible to enter into any discussion of this rich and highly interesting literature. In order to make up in a small way for this deficiency, a few examples of the most popular Persian *marāthī* will be given in Appendix D to this chapter. For a fairly good sampling of Persian *ta'zīyah* poetry, see E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), IV, pp. 172 ff.
43. Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 121 ff.
44. Early Muslim historians and traditionists differed on this point. Some assert that it was another, Sulayman Ibn Qattah. The two men were contemporaries and therefore it cannot be determined with certainty which of them had the honor of being the first to mourn the *Imām* in verse. In favor of al-Sahmī, see Khawārizmī, II, p. 150; and of Ibn Qattah, see Iṣfahānī, pp. 121–122. For a full discussion of this problem see Jawād Shubbār, *Adab al-Taff aw Shu'arā' al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut: al-'Alamī Foundation, 1388/1969), I, pp. 52 ff.
45. See the previous note.
46. Khawārizmī, II, p. 152.
47. Khālid Ibn Mi'dān. See Shubbār, I, p. 189; and Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 99–100. The date and actual identity of this poet are uncertain.
48. The words '*allāhu akbar*' were used as a war cry. Such war cries often included utterances of praise, hence the use of the word *tahlīl*, meaning 'exultation'. Khawārizmī, II, pp. 128–129.
49. Shubbār, I, p. 192.
50. Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-Sirrī al-Kindī al-Raththā' al-Mūṣulī (d. 344/955 or 360/970). See Shubbār, II, p. 36.
51. Khawārizmī, II, p. 152.
52. It is reported on the authority of Hilāl Ibn Nāfī', who said, 'I stood over him as he breathed his last. By God, I never saw one killed, bathed in his blood, of a better or more luminous countenance than him. I was therefore occupied by the radiance of his countenance and beauty of his form, unable to think of his death.' Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, p. 53.
53. Such comments about the beauty and overwhelming presence of the womenfolk of Ḥusayn are usually late, prefacing an oration delivered by one of the women or part of a confrontation between them and their captors. See for instance Majlisī, XLV, p. 113, and many other places.
54. Khawārizmī, II, p. 154.
55. For these and other verses attributed to Ḥusayn, see 'Aqqād, p. 42.
56. For traditions about al-Rabāb's life and death, see Shubbār, I, p. 62.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
58. This was the poem recited to the sixth *Imām* by Abū 'Imārah al-Munshid. See page 159 above.
59. Shubbār, I, pp. 198–200.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
61. Shubbār, II, p. 214.
62. See Shubbār, I, pp. 54–57. See also note 44 above.

63. Shubbār, I, p. 54.
64. 'Alī Ibn Ishāq al-Zāhī, 318/930–352/963. Shubbār, II, pp. 53–54. We shall discuss one of al-Zāhī's poems below.
65. This poet is quoted by al-Ṭurayhī, in his work *al-Muntakhab*, but he does not give the name of the poet. Rather he uses '*wa-li-llāh darru man qāl min al-rijāl*'. Ṭurayhī himself died in 1085/1674. From the language and ideas of the poem, it appears that the poet may have been one of his contemporaries.
66. See Qur'ān, XXI: 69.
67. Ṭurayhī, p. 105.
68. The author heard this poem chanted often in the ('Āshūrā') celebrations. It is similarly quoted by al-Ṭurayhī as a prelude to the *majlis* for the first day of Muḥarram. See Ṭurayhī, p. 3.
69. The sun in Arabic is feminine; hence the simile of a woman in mourning.
70. Ṭurayhī, p. 3.
71. Di'bil lived a long life, 148/765–246/860. He knew the sixth, seventh, and eighth *Imāms* and was highly favored by them. See Shubbār, I, pp. 297 f.
72. *Shi'ry Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī*, comp. Dr. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ashtar (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī, n.d.), p. 231. For the entire poem, see pp. 225–242. See also *Diwān Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī*, ed. 'Abd al-Ṣāhib al-Dijlī (Najaf: al-Adab Press, 1962), pp. 99 ff.
73. *Shi'ry Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī*, p. 231.
74. *Diwān Di'bil*, p. 245. For the entire section of this poem, entitled '*al-Maqṭal*', see pp. 245–250.
75. Shubbār, II, p. 20.
76. *Ibid.*, II, p. 31.
77. Shubbār, II, p. 54.
78. *Majlisī*, XLV, p. 115. There is no mention of any other poetry attributed to her in earlier sources, which may indicate the inauthenticity of this poem.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
80. See Shubbār, I, p. 75, for a discussion of the sources. This also is a late poem.
81. *Ibid.*, I, p. 75.
82. *Majlisī*, XLV, pp. 197–198.
83. Shubbār, I, p. 158. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 257.
84. Shubbār, I, p. 160. See also pp. 158–160 for the entire section on Sukaynah.
85. Khawārizmī, II, p. 137.
86. See Chapter 4 above, and Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 216 ff., for the original tale.
87. Khawārizmī, II, p. 137. See also pp. 139–140 for a similar poem by an unknown author.
88. Khawārizmī, II, pp. 146–147.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
90. Ṭurayhī, pp. 60–61. The poet is Sa'īd Ibn al-Nīlī (d. 565/1169).
91. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 269.
92. On the concept of *ḥaram* in ancient Arabic culture, see *Ilā Taha Ḥusayn* (Taha Ḥusayn Festschrift), ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Miṣr, Egypt, 1962), the article entitled *Ḥaram and Ḥawṭah*, by R. B. Sargeant, pp. 41–58.
93. See Chapter 4 above, p. 123.
94. The tradition is found in some of the earliest sources and has a complete *isnād* going back to Abū al-Jārūd, a well-known contemporary and disciple of the

fourth and fifth *Imāms* and an important authority in the chains of *isnād* of early *Shī'ī ḥadīth*.

95. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 268.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
99. Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 323. For a number of such traditions drawn from many sources, see Majlisī, XLIV: pp. 221 ff., and Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 271–273.
100. Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 328.
101. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 266–267.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
103. For an expression of the idea of concrete material rewards for the pilgrimage to Karbalā', see Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 272–273.
104. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 52. See also Mufid, p. 235.
105. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 272.
106. Qur'ān, XIX: 22.
107. Majlisī, CI, p. 116.
108. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 112.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 161. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 273; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, pp. 76–77.
110. For a description of these youths of paradise, see Qur'ān, LXXVI: 19.
111. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 81.
112. The tradition is related on the authority of the sixth *Imām*. For the entire text, see *Ibid.*, pp. 80–82.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 112 ff., for this and other such traditions.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 130; and Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, pp. 75 ff.
115. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 131. See also Majlisī, CI, p. 141.
116. Majlisī, CI, p. 103.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104. See the entire chapter, pp. 103–106. See also Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 174–175, where even greater rewards are promised.
118. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 162.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
120. *Ibid.*, pp. 175 ff. The man was called 'Alqamah on whose authority some of the most important *ziyārah* texts, both from the fifth and sixth *imāms*, were reported.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 179. The author took part in this *ziyārah* in 1971 in Mashhad, Iran. The experience was a powerful one indeed.
123. *Ibid.*, pp. 194 ff.
124. For an example see *ibid.*, p. 198.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
126. *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 230. This *ziyārah* is also quoted by Ibn Bābawayh in his canonical *ḥadīth* collection. *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh*, in the section on *ziyārah* which naturally follows that on the *ḥajj*. The author comments that this *ziyārah* was one of the earliest and most trustworthy *ziyārahs* he had seen. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh* (Najaf: Dār al-Islāmīyah, 1378/1958), II, pp. 359–360.
128. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 222. For the entire text, see pp. 222–244.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
131. Majlisī, CII, pp. 198–199.
132. *Ibid.*, CII, p. 198.
133. *Ibid.*, CII, p. 198.
134. *Ibid.*, CII, p. 199.
135. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 257.
136. John XVII.
137. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 116–117.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6: 'AT THE POOL OF AL-KAWTHAR'

1. The word *hawḍ* literally means 'tank' or 'basin'. The concept as it will appear in this chapter is not found in the Qur'ān, but rather in *ḥadīth* and popular tradition. *Al-kawthar* is a river, the name derived from the root *kathara* meaning abundance. Hence it is seen in popular tradition as a river of paradise, and often *hawḍ* and *kawthar* are used interchangeably. In addition to these denotations the words *hawḍ al-kawthar* are used in the traditions that we shall discuss below to symbolize the bliss, comfort and riches of believers in the hereafter. This latter signification must be borne in mind for our discussion in this chapter. For the Qur'ānic usage of *al-kawthar*, see Qur'ān, CVIII: 1.
2. See Chapter 1, p. 24, and especially note 6, p. 260.
3. Qur'ān, VII: 17 and XXVIII: 5. For an interesting parallel, see also Matthew V: 5.
4. See Chapter 2, p. 66, and Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 391.
5. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 256–263.
6. See his article, specifically on *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah* in Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*: Henri Corbin, 'De la philosophie prophétique en Islam Shi'ite', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXXI (1962), pp. 49–116.
7. For the concept of Christ as the Logos see John I–III. The new testament often hints at Christ bearing the marks of his crucifixion after his resurrection and in heaven; they will be displayed on the Day of Judgment. See Revelations XIX: 11–14, but especially the interesting sermon of Saint John Chrysostom on *The Lord's Passion* or *The Cross and the Good Thief*, spuriously attributed to Saint Augustine in *Patrologia Latina*, XXXIX, pp. 2047 ff. For an interesting parallel to this image of Christ, see Chapter 4, p. 136.
8. Cf., the traditions of the hunger and generosity of the Holy Family, discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 43–45.
9. Qur'ān, II: 156. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 333.
10. See the story of the plagues in Exodus VIII–XI, where this idea is repeatedly emphasized.
11. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 332–333.
12. See below in this chapter.
13. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 334.
14. The analogy here is made with Abraham as the Qur'ānic text asserts, 'O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham'; Qur'ān, XXI: 69; Arberry, II, p. 22.

15. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 68.
16. Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, p. 195. We shall have to return later to this tradition. Cf. the statement of the sixth *Imām* that on the Day of Judgment Ḥusayn will come, his blood gushing out from the wounds of his martyrdom. He will be accompanied by the Prophet who will protest to God, saying, '... My Lord ask my community (*ummah*) why they did that to my son.' Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, p. 162.
17. A paradisaical water mentioned in the Qur'ān, LXXXIII: 27.
18. The *ṣirāṭ* (straight path) mentioned in the Qur'ān, I: 5, denotes simply the straight way of living aright. In popular tradition, however, the *ṣirāṭ* is seen as a bridge between heaven and hell over which all men must cross.
19. Khawārizmī, I, p. 39.
20. *Al-wasīlah* means 'medium, device, means or station'. Although the last meaning is directly intended in this tradition, 'means' is also implied. To avoid confusion, the Arabic word will be used in most cases.
21. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 71–72.
22. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Ikmāl*, p. 27.
23. This term or relationship between the Prophet and 'Alī is of great importance for *Shī'ī* theology. See our discussion of this point in Chapter 3, p. 73.
24. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 85. See also Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 221 ff., for other such traditions.
25. This analogy is used to describe the *Mahdī* during his concealment, but in the same context it is carried further to apply to all the *imāms* before him. See Majlisī, LII, p. 93. This is volume XIII of the old edition dealing with the *Mahdī*; volumes LI, LII, and LIII of the modern edition (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyyah, 1384 A.H.).
26. Qur'ān, IX: 105; Arberry, I, p. 219.
27. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, p. 319.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 386. The text under discussion is important and brief enough to be reproduced in transliteration. '*Inna allāha ghadība 'alā al-shī'ah fa khayyarānī nafsī aw hum fawāqaytuhum w-allāhi bi-nafsī.*'
29. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 102.
30. See note 17 above.
31. Ibn Qawlawayh, pp. 102–103.
32. W. T. DeBary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), I, p. 204 and especially pp. 206–212.
33. See the illuminating study by T. Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Yokohama: Yurindo Publishing Company, 1965), p. 166.
34. See Chapter 2 above, and below in this chapter.
35. This tradition is reported on the authority of the fifth *Imām*. See Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 65.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
37. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 104.
38. This phrase is borrowed from the prophet Isaiah with which he described the small and faithful community which will stand firm in the face of cataclysmic events. The phrase fits, we think, the *Shī'ī* community from the point of view of our investigation. See Isaiah VII: 10–17 and X: 20–23.
39. See the interesting traditions dealing with the martyrdom of Zayd, the son of 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn and the imprisonment, exile and martyrdom of others of the

- descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭimah in Khawārizmī, II, pp. 112 ff., and Ibn Shahrāshūb, II, pp. 55 ff.
40. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 267.
 41. See Chapter 4, p. 125 and Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 78.
 42. See, for instance, the remarks of Majlisī, LIII, pp. 2 ff.
 43. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 135.
 44. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.
 45. See Qur'ān, XXI: 105, and XXVIII: 5.
 46. Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 107.
 47. This is an artificial play on the word *faṭama*, 'to wean'. Thus she is called Fāṭimah because God weaned her (*faṭamahā*) from the fire. See Khawārizmī, I, p. 51, and the following note.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
 50. See Khawārizmī, I, p. 52.
 51. 'Āmilī, *Jawāhir*, p. 247.
 52. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 336.
 53. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, p. 196; and for different versions of this tradition, see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Luhūf*, pp. 77–79.
 54. Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, p. 195.
 55. Revelations I: 7.
 56. Quoted by Majlisī from *Muntakhab al-Baṣā'ir* by al-Ḥasan Ibn Sulaymān, which is not available to the author. Majlisī, LIII, p. 46.
 57. Raḍī al-Dīn 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāwūs al-Baghdādī (known as Ibn Ṭāwūs), *Kitāb al-Malāḥim w-al-Fitan* (Najaf: Ḥaydariyyah Press, 1368 A.H.), p. 103. See also pp. 104–109 for many variants of this tradition.
 58. For a comprehensive study of the *Mahdī*, reference must be made to the Ph.D. dissertation presented by Al-Azīz Sachedina, University of Toronto, Canada, Spring, 1976.
 59. Ibn Bābawayh, *Ikmāl*, the chapter entitled *Ghaybāt al-Anbīyā'*, pp. 125 ff.
 60. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb Ibn Ishāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, *al-Rawḍah min al-Kāfī*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghifārī (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah, Ḥaydari Press, n.d.), p. 294. This promise of strength and conflict occurs in many traditions attributed to many of the *imāms*. See, for instance, Majlisī, LII, pp. 122 ff. and 279 ff.
 61. See the chapter entitled *alqābuhu wa-asmā'uhu wa-kunāh* in Majlisī, LI, pp. 28 ff., where most of these names and titles are collected from many sources.
 62. According to some early sources, he was born on the fifteenth of Sha'bān 256/870. For many of the traditions concerning his birth, see Majlisī, LI, pp. 3 ff.
 63. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 249. For a comprehensive discussion, see Majlisī, LI, pp. 3 ff.
 64. For *Shirī* accounts of the infancy of Moses, see Ibn Bābawayh, *Ikmāl*, pp. 150–151.
 65. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 251.
 66. See *ibid.*, p. 249; and Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, pp. 449–468, for the problems of the *Mahdī*'s birth and the authorities' search for him.
 67. Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 249.
 68. Ibn Bābawayh, *Ilal*, p. 246.
 69. Qur'ān, V: 10; Arberry, I, p. 144.

70. Ṭabarsī, *Ihtijāj*, II, p. 284.
71. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, p. 244.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 246–247.
73. Ṭabarsī, *Ihtijāj*, II, p. 50. See also Majlisī, LII, pp. 122–123. For similar assertions see pp. 124–126.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.
75. Thus al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) relates (on the authority of Ibn Qawlawayh [d. 367/978], who reports on the authority of al-Kulaynī, who traces it back to the sixth or fifth *Imām*) that bloody conflicts in the family of 'Abbās over authority must precede the coming of the *Mahdī*. See Mufīd, pp. 325 ff., and Majlisī, LII, pp. 191 ff., for his sources.
76. It is alleged that Yazīd sent a large army against Medina under the leadership of Muslim b. 'Uqbah. The men of the holy city were put to the sword and the women violated. See Ibn Qutaybah, *Imāmah*, pp. 209 ff. See also Majlisī, LII, p. 181, where most of the traditions concerning al-Sufyānī are collected. See also the long and fantastic tale related on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal in LIII, pp. 10–11.
77. Ibn Bābawayh, *Ikmāl*, p. 447; and Majlisī, LII, p. 192.
78. Mufīd, p. 336.
79. The appearance of *al-Dajjāl* and later of Christ, who will pray behind the *Mahdī*, is reported in many popular Muslim sources. In most *Shī'ī* works on the *Mahdī*, *al-Dajjāl* is mentioned, but he plays a very minor role. See for the *Shī'ī* traditions, Majlisī, LII, pp. 181 ff.
80. Matthew XXIV: 3–33.
81. Mufīd, pp. 328–329. See also Majlisī, LII, pp. 182 ff.
82. Other striking examples are Jewish eschatology, especially of the post-biblical period, and the concept of the Saoshyant, the future savior, in Zoroastrianism.
83. See, for example, Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, II, p. 168; Mufīd, p. 341; and, for other sources, Majlisī, LII, p. 285.
84. Mufīd, pp. 341–342.
85. Qur'ān, XIX: 55; Arberry, I, p. 334.
86. Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 65.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
88. Qur'ān, XXIV: 50; Arberry, II, p. 53.
89. Shaykh Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far (known as al-Kātib al-Nu'mānī, or Ibn Abī Zaynab, a well known disciple of al-Kulaynī), *Kitāb al-Ghaybah*, ed. Mirzā Walī Allāh al-Ishraqī (Tabriz: Maktabat al-Ṣābirī, 1383 A.H.), p. 147.
90. For a good view of the complexity of this literature, see Majlisī, LII, pp. 181–306.
91. Mufīd, p. 342.
92. Qur'ān, XI: 86; Arberry, I, p. 249.
93. Majlisī, LII, p. 192.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 306. See also Ibn Qawlawayh, p. 120, for a somewhat different version.
95. Majlisī, LIII, p. 9.
96. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
97. On the laying of the foundations of the *Ka'bah* by Abraham and Ishmael, see Qur'ān, II: 127 and XXII: 26. There is no reference in the Qur'ān to Adam having built the *Ka'bah*. This perhaps is a late tradition.

98. For the justification of this act, see the argument of the sixth *Imām*. Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿIlal*, pp. 229–230.
99. Mufīd, pp. 340–341.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 339.
101. Ṭabarsī, *Ihtijāj*, II, p. 11.
102. See Isaiah, XI.
103. See Revelations, XXI: 1.
104. Qurʾān, XXXIX: 69.
105. Mufīd, p. 342.
106. Quoted from *Muntakhab al-Baṣāʾir*, as are all of the traditions dealing with the *rajʿah* of Ḥusayn, in Majlisī, LIII, p. 39.
107. Majlisī, LIII, p. 44.
108. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–63.
109. Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb*, p. 195.
110. Majlisī, LIII, p. 56.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 42. See Qurʾān, II: 210; Arberry, I, p. 56.
112. Majlisī, LIII, p. 43.
113. Qurʾān, XIV: 48; Arberry, I, p. 279.
114. Qurʾān, XL: 16.

NOTES TO ‘CONCLUSION’

1. See T. Jacobsen, *Towards an Image of Tammuz and other Essays on Mesopotamian Religion and Culture*, ed. W. L. Moren (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 73 ff.
2. See Isaiah, XLIX to LIII.
3. See the interesting study by Christopher F. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1st ed. 1948, reprinted in lithograph 1950).
4. For a sustained expression of this idea, see the weekly periodical *al-Bayān* (Baghdad), edited and published by ʿAlī al-Khāqānī. In every year of its four-year history the periodical devoted one month of its issues to the memory of Ḥusayn. Articles were supplied by both *Shiʿī* and *Sunni* ʿulamāʾ and academic people as well as government officials. For very good examples, see Nos. 11–14 (January 1947) and Nos. 34–39 (December 1947).
5. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, *Thaʾr Allāh: A Play in Two Volumes*, II, *al-Ḥusayn Shahidan* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī li-l-Ṭibāʿah w-al-Nashr, 1388/1969), pp. 283–286.

NOTES TO ‘APPENDICES’

1. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 225.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 225–227; see Qurʾān, XXXVII: 107.
3. Majlisī, XLIV, pp. 308–309.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 308–310.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 252–254; Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, Majlis LXXXVII: pp. 355–357.
6. Qurʾān, III: 42–43; Arberry, I, p. 79; the tradition here quoted substitutes 'Fāṭimah' for 'Mary'.
7. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 70.
8. A *rak'ah* is a section of the ritual prayers which constitutes a complete cycle; standing, genuflecting, and prostrating. It is common to pray a few *rak'ahs* unintended for any of the five daily prayers in time of difficulty or need.
9. See Qurʾān, V: 112–115.
10. Qurʾān, III: 37; Arberry, I, p. 78.
11. Many of the meal traditions, so to speak, include the cloak (*kisā'*) tradition and it is often difficult to distinguish clearly one of these traditions from the others.
12. Of the many sources that relate this tradition, see for example Khawārizmī, II, p. 97.
13. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Shu'bah al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl 'an Āl al-Rasūl*, 3rd ed., ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: Ḥaydarīyyah Press, 1382/1962), p. 170.
14. See Chapter 4 for details.
15. *Irbilī*, p. 202. The author quotes this poem from a very early source. See also Khawārizmī, I, p. 223.
16. al-Ḥarrānī, p. 174.
17. The custom in ancient Arabia was that when two infants of different parents are nursed by the same woman (normally hired for this purpose) the two infants were regarded as 'brothers (or sisters) in nursing'.
18. The reference is to Ibn Ziyād's adoption into the family of Mu'āwīyah. See Chapter 4 for details.
19. al-Ḥarrānī, p. 171.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
21. Khawārizmī, I, p. 152.
22. Majlisī, XLIV, p. 193. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, pp. 224–225.
23. Published by al-Andalus Press, Beirut, 1964.
24. Compare the argument of the twelfth *Imām* in Ibn Bābawayh, '*Ilal*', pp. 241–242.
25. *Haft*, p. 115 ff.
26. Qurʾān, XXXVII: 107.
27. This curious assertion has no basis in general *Shrī* tradition.
28. Qurʾān, IV: 157–158; Arberry, I, p. 123.
29. Qurʾān, XXXVII: 102–107.
30. *Haft*, pp. 120 ff.
31. The words *anta allāh alladhī lā ilaha illā hūwa al-ḥayy al-qayyūm w-al-mumīt w-al-muḥīy* are Qurʾānic expressions of God's eternity and omnipotence. They also imply the *shahādah* (profession of faith in one God). See Qurʾān, II: 255 and VII: 158.
32. All three selections are taken from the book, *Hamīsheh baḥār* (Tehran, Jahān Press, 1348 A.H.), a collection of popular elegies and eulogies of the *imāms* compiled by Hajj Ḥasan Najjān.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
34. *Ibid.*, (By) Ṣaghīr Iṣfahānī, p. 186.
35. *Ibid.*, (By) Mīr Abū-l Qāsim Zawqī, p. 183.

36. See Majlisī, CI, p. 328.
37. Qurʾān, VI: 65, and XI: 50.
38. Qurʾān, VII: 73, and XI: 61.
39. Qurʾān, XXXVII: 107.
40. See Chapter 3, p. 73.
41. Qurʾān, XXVII: 17 and 18.
42. Qurʾān, LXVIII: 48–58.
43. See Chapter 1, p. 36, above.
44. See Chapter 1, p. 36, above, and Ibn Shahrāshūb, III, p. 328.
45. Qurʾān, IV: 171.
46. Qurʾān, LIII: 14.
47. Qurʾān, LIII: 15.
48. Majlisī, CI, pp. 317–328.

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