

Mysticism and Imam Husayn

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An understanding of the seminal years of Islam is contingent upon a familiarity with the household of the Prophet. Their biographies reveal the historical, theological, and philosophical formation of the Muslim world. The Prophet's lineage, therefore, illuminates the religion for those both outside and part of the tradition. While their station as Imamate, or spiritual and temporal leader, is contested between the two major expressions of Islam, their significance is not doubted in any account. An examination of the Prophet's family is at the core of a study of Islam.

While Sunni Islam disputes the temporal authority of the household of the Prophet, or Ahl al-Bayt, Shi'ism declares that the lineage's command is present in every realm. This division does not diminish the status of the Ahl al-Bayt but it does allude to one of the major points of contention between the two branches, the life and death of Husayn ibn Ali. In a tragically short period of time, the grandson of Muhammad and third Imam of Shi'ism was able to achieve an immortal effect in the world. The events of Karbala that resulted in his death are commemorated in a yearly day of mourning, underscoring Husayn's pervasive outcome. The reasons behind the momentous nature of this event will be revealed through an in depth understanding at Imam Husayn. Specifically, it is the perspective of mysticism that will provide the greatest insight into the historical and traditional contribution of Husayn. By illustrating the qualities of the third Imam as congruent to those of a mystic, the motivations for his revolutionary actions and effects will be apparent.

This paper will attempt to identify the mystical qualities of Imam Husayn and grasp their implications. To begin, a cohesive definition of mysticism and the universal qualities of a mystic are necessary in establishing a setting to understand the third Imam. A more particular characterization will then be developed through exploring mystical aspects of the Islamic world, including Sufi and Shi'ite thought. Applying this perception to Husayn's life, actions, and recorded words will establish the third Imam as a pivotal mystical figure.

A general definition for mysticism, while unable to fully pervade the subject, establishes a footing by which a representation of Imam Husayn can originate. F.C. Happold addresses this

complexity in his text, Mysticism: A Study and Anthology. “The word is, however, used with a number of different meanings and carries different connotations to different minds” (Happold 36). The author expounds upon various aspects of mysticism in an attempt to draw out the center through establishing the circumference. Three major facets are identified, however they are not to be interpreted as mutually exclusive. Instead, each standpoint contains a symbiotic relationship with the others, furthering the indeterminate nature of the term. The first, “a particular type of insight or knowledge about God” (36), concerns the quality of love, signifying the relationship one has with the Divine. The “noetic quality” (37) highlights the prevalence of the intellect, the further need for awareness of the self in mysticism. Finally, Happold underscores “the art of union with reality” (38) as the process by which the establishment of the later two inevitably concludes. These three aspects of mysticism, love of God, knowledge of self, and their ultimate combination, are the basis on which the term and its application to Husayn can be realized.

As a rudimentary explanation of the term mysticism has been established, it is now pertinent to identify the figure that embodies this definition, the mystic. While the particular qualities of such a person are based upon their tradition, a universal aspect can be acknowledged. Evelyn Underhill outlines the common attributes that can be found in such an individual.

We meet these persons in the east and the west; in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest: the finding of a “way out” or a “way back” to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for absolute truth. This quest, for them, has constituted the whole meaning of life. They have made for it without effort sacrifices which have appeared enormous to other men (Underhill 3).

Underhill attests to similarities in the timeless nature, desired goal, and actions of the mystic. To incorporate the previous definition, it is through the connection between God and the self

that a mystic seeks to attain the Ultimate Reality. One's commitment to this goal, therefore, composes the whole of their being and allows for the total surrender of the self into God. Imam Husayn's life, as this paper will establish, exemplifies the mystical relationship between man and God.

To further understand Husayn Ibn Ali, a discussion of Islamic mysticism provides particular insight into the esoteric aspects of the Imam inspired by his tradition. The conception of unity uncovered in the general discussion of mysticism is given further dimension through Islam. Seyyed Hossein Nasr's essay, "God," explains the dual nature of the absolute as being part of and beyond the world that is revealed to man. The ability to possess both the internal and external realms is expounded upon in the religion's holy text.

The Divine Oneness implies not only transcendence but also immanence. The Quran asserts over and over again the transcendence of God above and beyond all categories of human thought and imagination, for He is "beyond all that they describe [of Him]" (IV, 100) and "All things perish save His Face" (XXVIII, 88)... Spirituality implies not only the essence of transcendence but also the experience of immanence in the very light of this transcendence (Nasr 314).

The Quran provides a traditional basis for understanding the pervasive nature of oneness. Transcendence and imminence are equally important when considering the enveloping nature of mysticism. While this is often depicted as a strictly inward expression, these two terms highlight the importance of an outward manifestation as well.

Quite naturally, however, the exoteric dimension of Islam emphasizes more the dimension of transcendence, and the esoteric immanence. But this must be understood in the light of the fundamental truth that the esoteric already assumes the acceptance and the practice of the exoteric (314-315).

An important facet of Islamic mysticism, therefore, becomes the relationship between action and thought. As the Ultimate is not relegated to the interior so must be the person who seeks it.

A mystic must not be confused with an ascetic. The actions of Imam Husayn are imbued with spiritual significance.

Nasr also outlines specific elements of Islamic spiritual practice. These acts outline the code of conduct necessary for a mystic. Further illustrating the importance of action, such rituals are contingent upon the spiritual basis. An understanding of God is achieved through the Divine Names. Therefore, the invocation of God's name is central to both the tradition and its mystical element.

The Quranic doctrine of the Divinity is based on the distinction between God in His Essence and His Names and Qualities which are at once the same as the Essence and distinct from It and also from each other. This doctrine, which has been elaborated by theologians, philosophers, and Sufis in numerous works, is also the cornerstone of Islamic spirituality inasmuch as the invocation (dhikr) of the Names of God not only permeates all Islamic life but also, in its technical and esoteric sense, constitutes the very heart of Islamic practice (318).

Dhikr represents the physical incarnation of the esoteric. The invocation of God's name becomes a symbol, given special significance in Islam, for the comprehension of the Divine. One such name of note portrays this need for a mental grasp, or gnosis, of God. The actions of the mystic not only originate in thought, but also become reliant upon it in order to retain significance.

As for the Name of God as Light (al-Nur), it is directly connected to those spiritual paths which emphasize the way of knowledge, for, according to the Prophet, "al-'ilm nur," knowledge is light (321).

Nasr unveils two important aspects of the mystic and mysticism, the reliance on knowledge and symbol for God as light. The interplay between action and thought is rooted in the tradition. As Haddad and Underhill uncovered the importance of a relationship between God and man, Nasr

provides unequivocal means by which this affiliation is established and maintained. These specific components are exemplified when examining Imam Husayn.

According to Sufism, or mystical Islam, the search for God ultimately leads to the abandonment of the self. As the Divine reality becomes at once transcendent and immanent, the concept of the self has no choice but to dissolve. It is the realization of the Ultimate that causes the ecstasy associated with a mystical experience. As Omaima Abo-Bark explains, this elated sensation is bound to the realization of God.

Ecstasy or *wajd* is the natural and immediate consequence. Literally meaning “finding,” *wajd* points to the mystic being taken out of himself and finding God (Abo-Bakr 41). The process by which this spiritual realization occurs indicates the stages by which the relationship between God and man is developed. Each step involves a progressive loss of the self, culminating in absolute selflessness and unity with the Divine.

First, there is *tawajjud* (passion), the level experienced by a person who has not become completely selfless, but is trying to put himself in that state. Second, *wajd* (ecstasy) is for the one who has gone beyond the self, but is aware that he has gone beyond. Third, *wujud* (Being) is the level of one who has gone beyond awareness of the condition of having given up everything (41).

The contingency upon the denial of the self for the realization of God illustrates the magnitude of this concept. It is a necessary transformation for the mystic to realize his true nature. Upon further understanding Husayn, the recurring theme of selflessness will reveal the mystical motivation for his actions.

Husayn’s institution, the Imamate, is innately mystical. In Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, Henry Corbin expounds upon the spiritual formation of Shi’ism. Corbin argues that the popular notion of the expression’s formation, a split from the majority over the question of political succession, is mere reductionism. Instead, he points out that this conception “completely overlook[s] the important body of literature consisting of the conversation of the

first adepts with successive Imams until the ninth century of our time” (Corbin 57). The institution of Imamate, while its figures maintain universal acclaim, is central to the formation of Shi’ism. Furthermore, Corbin explains, “these conversations bare witness that the flowing of Shi’ism was essentially the flowering, or rather the resurgence, of gnosis in Islam” (57). As we have previously noted, gnosis has an intrinsic connection with mysticism. Corbin states, “Shi’ite gnosis is preeminently the esotericism of Islam” (57). Therefore, as the third Imam, Husayn ibn Ali is not only a mystic himself, but also serves to establish the example of mysticism for his community.

The prevalence of action in Islamic mysticism is further revealed through the expression of Shi’ism. While many historical sources point to the tragedy of Karbala as the solidifying split of Shi’ism from the majority, it is important to note that its root is not strictly political. Conversely, the importance placed upon the mystical perception of action allows the school of thought to form around an esoteric base. As Frithjof Schoun explains, “Shi’ism can be explained in terms of a fundamentally esoteric intention, which it nevertheless readily translates into exoteric terms” (Schoun 102). Corresponding with the notion of unity, the outward and inward implications do not exist as segregated forms.

Shi’ism is a mysticism based upon the necessary defeat-changed ultimately into victory-of the earthly manifestation of the Logos, and it is thereby linked to the mystery enunciated by the Gospel according to St John: “And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not” (98).

As we will explore the events of Karbala and Imam Husayn, mysticism particular to Shi’ism will also be revealed. The spiritual dimension of mystical martyrdom is therefore extremely important when exploring Husayn. Due to the pervasive nature of the subject, it is impossible to ignore one form of esotericism for the sake of another. Therefore, universal, Islamic, and Shi’ite mysticism will all be found in Imam Husayn as all manners are ultimately dependent upon each other.

Husayn was born in Medina during the year 626 CE, four years after the Prophet immigrated to the area from Mecca. He is the son of Fatimah and Ali, the first Imam, and the younger brother of Hasan, the second Imam. Through an inspection of the early part of his life, specifically the figures that he was associated with, the seeds of a mystic can be identified. Of particular importance is an understanding of the figures that played primary roles in the third Imam's life. If it can be said that Husayn is defined by his relationship to the Prophet, then his early years serve as the example of their intimacy.

There can be no doubt that the Prophet had a great fondness for his two grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn, whom he referred to as the 'chiefs of the youths of paradise' and about whom he had been widely quoted as saying 'he who has loved Hasan and Husayn has loved me and he who has hated them has hated me' (Momen 26).

Muhammad's devotion to Hasan and Husayn is illustrated in several recorded sayings that afford the two a holy standing. The Prophet recognizes their other worldly nature by assigning them specific roles in the afterlife as "chiefs of the youths of paradise." The praise of the brothers exemplifies not only their importance to their grandfather, but also their significance to all of Islam.

Further evidence of this bond can be found in the event of the Mubahala contest in which the Prophet and his immediate family present themselves to Christian group. "Muhammad came out with only Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn and they stood under a cloak" (14). It is this event that earned this figures the title Ahl al-Kisa, or the people of the cloak. The Prophet's actions were in direct reference to similar depictions of other prophets.

Then a great book called al-Jami was consulted which contained the writings and traditions of all the prophets. In this book, reference was found to how Adam had seen a vision of one brilliant light surrounded by four other lights and was told by God that these were five of his descendants. Similar things were found in the writings of Abraham, Moses and Jesus (14).

As Ahl al-Kisa, the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn are all depicted as divine light. This portrayal directly relates them to the conception of God as al-Nur. This light is related to the immanence and transcendence of the Ultimate. As the light symbolizes the spiritual path of knowledge, or a way of understanding reality, the people of the cloak are shown as able to embody this ability. Effectively, Husayn and his family are given direct mystical attributes.

As a young boy he witnessed the hardships faced by his father, first in being passed over to succeed the Prophet and then in the opposition faced when finally named the third Caliph, or temporal leader. Ali's selflessness is evocative of the mystical conception of selflessness found in Sufism. Despite constant hurdles, Husayn's father strove to act in accordance with establishing a relationship with God.

During his caliphate of nearly four years and nine months, Ali followed the way of the Prophet and gave his caliphate the form of a spiritual movement and renewal and began many different types of reforms. Naturally, these reforms were against the interests of certain parties that sought their own benefit. As a result, a group of the companions made a pretext of the death of the third caliph to raise their heads in opposition and begin to revolt and rebel against Ali (Tabataba'i 192).

It was in Ali's attempts to bring about unity that resulted in his assassination. This division concerning the extent of a leader's power is clearly opposed by Ali. Corresponding to the Shi'ite principle of Tawhid, or divine unity, a political position is incomplete without the spiritual component. During the Imamate of Husayn, the ideals and actions exhibited by Ali would progress.

Husayn also witnessed the ten-year Imamate of his older brother, Hasan. This period was characterized by particular hardships, as the Ummayid dynasty forced the Ahl al-Bayt into relative seclusion. Most of Hasan's Imamate, therefore, was conducted in quietude. This decision by the second Imam is not to be confused with inaction. Instead, this deliberate move was made with intentions congruent to those of Imam Ali. "In this situation abdication was the

only realistic course of action open to Hasan and avoided pointless bloodshed” (Momen 27). While many were ready to fight with Hasan, he was aware that the Umayyad forces were insurmountable and chose to keep his supporters alive, recognizing in them an importance for stations other than martyrdom. “Following the assassination of Ali, the Kufan army had rallied around Hasan to face the advancing Syrian army” (27). The idea of appropriate action that is inherent to mysticism indicates that an element of timing is necessary to consider. As such an uprising by Hasan would have cost many lives, he abdicated power and allowed his followers, and ultimately the supporters of Husayn, to survive.

After Hasan’s death, Husayn is declared Imam and made the central focus for the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt. Early on, Husayn displayed the prudence of his older brother, maintaining his position in relative silence. For nine and a half years, the vast majority of his Imamate, Husayn acted with strict discretion. This time period coincided with the life of Umayyad ruler Mu’awiyah, the same figure that Hasan was forced to abdicate.

By force and necessity Imam Husayn had to endure these days and to tolerate every kind of mental and spiritual agony and affliction from Mu’awiyah and his aides – until in the middle of the year 60 A.H. Mu’awiyah died and his son Yazid took his place (Tabatabai’i 196).

While the Imam was able to suffer without uprising during the rule of Mu’awiyah, his son Yazid posed an even greater threat. Widespread disapproval of Yazid still persists today due to his complete lack of piety. He is described as “a drunkard who openly ridiculed and flouted the laws of Islam” (Momen 28). This initial choice to remain silent is reminiscent of the Imam’s predecessors. As parallel to the mystical conception, action must exhibit a relationship with thought. The multifaceted representation of unity in the Quran illuminates Husayn’s purpose. While immediate rebellion would have been possible, the time in which Husayn revolted exposes his ability to perceive the maximum effectiveness for this feat. Therefore, his actions contain mystical collaboration.

After the installation of Yazid, Husayn journeyed to Mecca in an attempt to evade the Umayyad leader. After an attempt on his life, the third Imam realized that revolutionary actions were his only option. The time that Husayn faced no longer favored the caution as previously performed. Instead, Husayn acted in a manner indicating his right knowledge of the moment.

Amidst the vast crowd of people he stood up and in a short speech announced that he was setting out for Iraq. In this short speech he also declared that he would be martyred and asked Muslims to help him in attaining the goal he had in view and to offer their lives to the path of God (Tabataba'i 197-198).

This call to action was one of many indications that Husayn was aware beforehand of his ultimate fate. The ability to accurately perceive reality is the cornerstone quality of a mystic. Husayn embarks on the quest for God aware that it will consume his life, as discussed by Evelyn Underhill. The determination present in this feat will be further revealed when Husayn's sayings are illuminated by the mystical motivation.

The tenth day of the month Muharram holds grave significance to the followers of Ahl al-Bayt as the day in which Husayn ibn Ali's actions met their fated conclusion. The observance of *Ashura* marks the death of Husayn and his 72 companions at Karbala. Despite lack of support and the basic resources of food and water, Husayn continued undeterred. Asghar Ali Engineer provides a historical account of the events in Islam and Liberation Theology.

On the 10th of Muharram, hungry and thirsty, they were set upon by the forces of Yazid and each one of Husayn's followers fought heroically until death. They embraced death most cheerfully rather than surrender to Yazid and his counter-revolution. Husayn too met his most tragic end (Engineer 232-233).

The recognition and acceptance of ultimate demise was not a deterrent for Husayn due to the mystical backing of his actions. As the physical battle became inseparable from the spiritual one, death did not imply defeat. Schoun's description of Shi'ite mysticism provides context for

the esoteric understanding of the event at Karbala. Therefore, the seemingly darkest hour provides the greatest spiritual victory.

However, these martyrs' blood gave new lease of life to Islamic revolution. Husain and his followers died but Islam remained... These martyrs, though physically dead, are spiritually alive... Are they not witnessing until today what they died for? Are the Islamic principles not eternal after all? (233)

Not only was Husayn aware of the immediate effects of his actions, he displays foreknowledge of their vast implications. As the third Imam initially set off to resist a ruler who symbolized the desecration of Islam, the religion's preservation persists, due to Husayn, even today.

Husayn's sacrifice at Karbala not only indicates a proper understanding of reality, it also denotes an intimate connection to God. This relationship is a defining characteristic of a mystic. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi explains that Husayn's nearness with God afforded him an opportunity to fulfill the Divine's direct request.

As far as al-Husayn's case is concerned, to our knowledge none of his successors interpreted his presence in Karbala as being a "political" act aimed at upsetting the powers that be. According to his own successors, the act of the Imam was of a Friend of God (wali) fulfilling his destiny according to the will of the Beloved (Amir-Moezzi 66)

The understanding that Husayn could be called friend of God is directly related to the definition of mysticism as provided by Haddad. The element of love is clearly demonstrated as Husayn exhibits insight into God's will. The interconnection between God and the third Imam also recalls the Sufi conception of selflessness. It is through intimate knowledge that Husayn can abandon his own life and give himself fully to the Ultimate.

As we have discovered the Islamic conception of mysticism as the combination of esoteric and exoteric. It becomes apparent that Husayn's martyrdom serves as the ultimate welding of the two realms. The events of Karbala did not only have bearing on the temporal

world, but it was equally momentous for the psyche, or soul, of all people bound to the household of the Prophet.

The martyrdom of Husayn was of great religious and moral significance for the followers of the house of the Prophet and soon proved to be the most effective agent in the propagation and rapid spread of Shi'ite feelings. It ultimately played an immensely important role in the consolidation of Shi'ite identity in Islam. The tragic fate of the grandson of the Prophet henceforth added to Shi'ism an element of passion, which renders human psychology more receptive than do merely doctrinal arguments. The death of Husayn thus set the seal of an official Shi'ism, and his name and memory became an inseparable part of its moral and religious fervor (Jafri 170).

Husayn's achievement is not only the victory-in-defeat model of mysticism proposed by Schoun. This success is also found through his fulfillment of the true function of an Imam, the establishment of divine unity or Tawhid. Syed Husain M. Jafri's discussion of Shi'ism reveals the extent of Husayn's influence as culminating in the combination of the physical and spiritual realm. The transcendent nature of the Imam's actions establish his fundamental being as in tune with universal, Islamic, and Shi'ite mysticism.

The recorded sayings of Imam Husayn further illustrate his position as a mystic. In relating these passages to our understanding of mysticism, the intricate meaning of his words are revealed. These instances, as collected by M.T. Ja'Fari, deal chiefly with the period of time after Yazid came to power. Husayn's extroverted character in this period is understood, so demonstrated earlier, as his ability to recognize timely action. Therefore, it is the restlessness of his last six months that result in a multitude of documented words and actions.

Many of Husayn's recorded words involve personal conversations with God. These utterances suggest the Imam's awareness of his intimate relationship with the Divine. Not only does Husayn recognize his position in respect to God, he is also aware of God's true nature. On one occasion, Husayn addresses God, "Oh lord, you know that I am yearning to witness your

beauty and majesty, I bear witness to your lordship and confess to your unity and yearn to return toward it” (Ja’Fari). This seemingly short line is ripe with mystical connotation. Husayn exhibits realization of ultimate unity and wishes to lose the self to be incorporated with God. Furthermore, the integration with God is a return, corresponding with Underhill’s classification of a mystic as searching for a “way back.” This saying epitomizes the fundamental understanding of mysticism, an awareness of one’s relationship with God, Ultimate Reality, and path to achieve spiritual fulfillment. Moreover, the drive toward God, as displayed by the third Imam, is recognized as a mystical love.

As Husayn prepared for the conclusion of his uprising, he again expresses his perception of the world and God. This saying conveys an awareness and discernment for that which is truly transcendent and immanent. Despite the countless hardships faced by the third Imam, he is able to see through to the Real.

Oh God verily I express my praise and gratitude with the best of gratitudes worthy of you. Gratitude for any joy and happiness that you gave me or any sorrow and affliction. Oh God I praise you and thank you that you blessed us by granting our family the gift of prophethood and you taught us the lessons of the Quran and the principles of religion. We thank you for giving us ears that hear and eyes that see [the truth of your being] and hearts that are contemplative (Ja’Fari).

By conveying equal appreciation for pleasure and pain, Husayn shows that he is cognizant of true reality. Only the mystic is able to fully understand that all earthly manifestations are part of the supreme unity. Additionally, as mysticism declares that man is able to have knowledge of God, or gnosis, the third Imam identifies this faculty within all people. Husayn attests to Nasr’s assertion of wisdom as a primary mystical path toward the realization of the Divine.

Further substantiating Husayn’s ability to recognize unity in both positive and negative aspects of the material world, the Imam shows no fear in the face of certain death. As his

martyrdom is at hand, Husayn's words indicate a grasp of both himself and the outcome of his actions.

By God I swear if I did not have the hope of martyrdom when I face my enemy tomorrow, in which death will be certain to me, I will have mounted my horse and went away from your people. By God I swear that the son of Ali is more intimate with death than a child is with the breast of his mother (Ja'Fari).

Despite foreknowledge of his earthly demise, Husayn persists with revolution. This statement indicates that the Imam is also already aware of the effects of his martyrdom. As explained earlier by Syed Husain M. Jafri, this outcome serves both the internal and external realms and is therefore beyond multiplicity. These words also recall the Sufi conception of selflessness. Husayn's willingness to sacrifice himself symbolizes his loss of self in God. It is through this mindset that the grandson of the Prophet can state that he possesses profound knowledge of death, comparing this understanding to a relationship between an infant and mother. As the third Imam realizes that this death is a merging with the divine, he recognizes its latent ecstasy.

Praise God for his majesty and power that which he wills will be, there is no support other than him and may his greetings be to his Prophet. To the children of Adam, death is like a necklace that is sitting around the neck of a young woman. I am yearning for sitting with my ancestors and meeting them (Ja'Fari).

In this quotation, Husayn portrays his goal as rich reward. Death is not a destructive consequence here, but instead an opportunity of attainment. Husayn realizes his ability to become one with God and therefore displays longing to reach this end. These two passages from Husayn also reveal the Islamic practice of dhikr, or invocation of God's name. The repetition by which the Imam addresses God by name symbolizes Husayn's comprehension of the Divine. The pervasive nature of Husayn's awareness of reality indicative of his mystical consciousness.

This desire to achieve one's fate corresponds again with the mystical quest as outlined by Underhill. Husayn is able to commit to this great sacrifice in order to meet that which he has

constituted as the whole meaning of life. The third Imam similarly recognizes that his martyrdom is not as personally difficult as others might perceive it to be, as surrender to the necessary course of action has been ever present in his existence.

That which motivates me to move on this path is nothing but the truth. To reach it, I will not save from hardship. My destruction will be in falling in distance or being indifferent from the truth. He who steps on such a path will not be afraid of the hardships of the path. Rather he sees victory in being martyred on this path, a path that opens toward the Abode and saints among the children of Adam (Ja'Fari).

Just as mysticism asserts the latent ability in all of mankind to achieve knowledge of the Divine, Husayn relays that he is not imbued with talent that separates him from others. Instead, conveying great humility, the Imam claims that any person is capable of his prodigious acts through a commitment to the mystical journey. These sayings portray Imam Husayn as a truly mystical figure. Moreover, it is clear that Husayn is cognizant of his role as a mystic and its bearing on his words and actions. As he is motivated solely by the truth, the Imam takes comfort in the mystical mode of thought, confident in his ultimate success.

The life and death of Husayn ibn Ali are fundamental elements in the development of Islam. Both historically and traditionally, the seminal years of the religion are found within this time period. While there are several events that can be recognized as pivotal in this era, the tragedy of Karbala, as exhibited through its yearly commemoration, remains prevalent to this day. The motivation of Husayn's thought, action, and speech is therefore vital to discover in developing an understanding of this time. If Husayn is to be perceived as enthused by the idea of mysticism, it is important to establish a grasp of this term. At the universal level, mystical aspects of note include love, knowledge, and union with reality. Mysticism as specific to Islam brings further dimension to this delineation, enforcing the primacy of gnosis while introducing the interrelation between the esoteric and exoteric realms and the concept of selflessness. Finally, the mystical definition of Shi'ism emphasizes the ability to find illumination within

darkness. By applying this understanding to Husayn, he becomes the embodiment of mysticism. In an exploration of the figures near to the third Imam, specifically the Prophet, Ali, and Hasan, the seeds of Husayn's mystical conscious can be identified. The ten years in which Husayn maintains the station of Imam exemplifies both inward and outward mysticism as he displays a right knowledge of reality. The Imam's mystical martyrdom also adds significance to the notion of selflessness. Finally, through Husayn's own words, it is clear that the Imam himself recognizes his mystical quest, love of God, and ultimate success through self-sacrifice. Therefore, mysticism is unveiled as the pursuit of a meaningful relationship with God and Imam Husayn is identified as the archetypical mystic.

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