The Manifestation of the Divine Honor in the ‘Āshūrā Heroic Act

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Abstract
The examination of the word “‘izza” (honor) in the divine discourse and its attribution to God, the Prophet (s), and the believers is important in determining and directing the personal and social life policies. In this article (which is on the manifestation of the divine honor in Imam Ḥusayn’s heroic act), we aim to illustrate some of the honorable deeds of Imam Ḥusayn on his way from Medina to Karbala up until the ‘Āshūrā evening. These will prove wrong the tales of some people who interpret Imam’s movement in ways far from his high status. We also aim to prove the manifestation of the divine honor in Imam Ḥusayn’s heroic act and the fulfillment of the concept of true honor and the victory of the honorable people and to show the great difference that exists between the true honor and victory and the victory attained by force and brutality. We also aim at reminding a lesson from among the ‘Āshūrā lessons.

Keywords
Imam Ḥusayn’s heroic act, ‘Āshūrā, Divine honor, Imam Ḥusayn’s (a) honorableness.

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Introduction

Heroism and honor are two main elements of Imām Ḥusayn’s (a) movement that might be abundantly seen on his way from Medina through Mecca to Karbala. The effects of this honorableness have continued even after his martyrdom. In order to determine the honorable policies for all dimensions of life – either personal or social – based on Imām Ḥusayn’s (a) conduct (ṣīra), this article refers to some aspects of the manifestation of the divine honor in his verbal and practical conducts in a part of his Imāmat period. Moreover, this issue should be a historical lesson for the humanity. However, we first need to present some generalities of the discussions related to ‘izza.

The meaning of ‘Izza

The word “‘izza” means ability against “dhilla” (dishonor). It is suggested in Rāghib’s Mufradāt: “‘Izza” is taken from ‘Arḍ ‘izāz,” i.e. the harsh land. Therefore, rigor is the original meaning of ‘izza. However, due to the expansion of the usage, a person who cannot be defeated is also called ‘azīz, such as “O’ mighty prince” (Qur’ān 12:88); also, this word is used to mean victory, as in the verse “… and overcame me in the argument…” (Qur’ān 38:23), and absolute difficulty, as in “… he grieves for your suffering …” (Qur’ān 9:128). ‘Izza has also been used to mean false pride, as in the verse “Nay, but those who disbelieve are in false pride” (Qur’ān 38:2) (Ṭābātābā’ī, 1984, vol. 17:32).

Possessors of honor

The original possessor of honor is God: “the Might belongs to Allāh altogether” (Qur’ān 35:10), that is, the Sacred Being that has the ability to undertake rigorous deeds; the One who overcomes everything and dominates them, all levels of existence are under His control without disobedience, and all are subjugated by His might with no dare to oppose Him and are abased to Him … The absolute possession and the victory over every issue and creature is for Him, the movement of any mover is under his will, and any action and actor rely on him and his order. Moreover, God is ‘Azīz, that is Almighty, because He is super-infinite Necessary Being with an infinite power. Within the realm of existence, there is no mighty other than Him, and the potency of every mighty is a shadow of His might and a level of His power (Khumaynī, 1987: 147). Since any perceivable non-God has a poor essence and an abased self, all honor belongs to God and there is no creature who has essential honor (Ṭabātābā’ī, 1984, vol. 17: 35). However, as God is told “…You give authority to whomever You want and take it away from whomever You want …” (Qur’ān 3:26), anyone who follows his
guardianship and obeys him manifests God’s honor. As the Prophet of Allāh (s) says: “Anyone who wants the honor of both worlds should follow the honorable God” (Muḥammadī Ray Shahrī, 2006, vol. 7: 365). Therefore, the Prophet of Allāh (s) and the believers achieve honor and become examples of “…Honor belongs to God, His Messenger and the believers…” (Qur’ān 63: 8). Thus, the believer also gets honorable, that is to say, he becomes impermeable and unconquerable, and attains such power by which he is never entangled with lust. This power prohibits him from prostrating, yielding, and compromising to the rebels and outlaws, and moves him up to a level at which he is resistant to bribe and force (Makārim Shīrāzī, Tafsīr nimūna, 2007, vol. 18: 216). Then, he does not exchange his spiritual dignity and superior human status with anything and shuns away from anything that damages his honorableness (Falsafī, 1991, vol. 1: 153). As Imām Ṣādiq (a) says, he becomes even stronger than a mountain, because a mountain can be cut out by ax hits, but a believer’s faith cannot be cut out by anything (Muḥammadī Ray Shahrī, 2006, vol. 7: 363).

How to achieve ‘izza

From the viewpoint of the Qur’ān, one who has theoretical faith and puts it into practice will be given honor and dignity by God: “He who wants might, the Might belongs to Allāh altogether. To Him ascend good words, and the righteous deed He raises” (Qur’ān 35:10). In this verse, God introduces faith and the righteous deed as the two principles of the achievement of honor. That is, when the belief and faith are right and true, surely the deeds a person does are congruent with those beliefs … and the more a deed is repeated, the firmer, clearer, and more influential the actor’s beliefs will become (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1984, vol. 17: 35).

Cases such as fairness in social relations (Kulaynī, 2009, vol. 4: 430), patience, continence and needlessness to people (ibid.), obedience to and fear of God, and unity (q.v. Majlīs, 2019, vol. 77 & 78) have been mentioned in narrations as the instances of the very two principles of piety and servitude. It is clear that as the level of piety and servitude increases, the degree of one’s honor also grows. Therefore, after the noble Prophet (s), Imāms (a) are at highest level of honor.

Indices of honorableness

Reflection on the Qur’ānic verses and Islamic narrations leads us to the qualities or indices of the honorable individuals or societies. These include obedience to God, the prevalence of divine values in the beliefs and manners of people and society, the opposition to oppression, the avoidance of overemphasis on wellbeing, freedom from worldly lusts and desires, patient
obedience and avoidance of committing sins, patience against disasters, the true and permanent winning of the hearts, the observation of moral virtues such as forgiveness, anger control, and pardoning, abstinence, respecting the relatives, the purification of soul, etc.

Imām Ḥusayn’s (a) honor-making in the ‘Āshūrā heroic act

Various dimensions of Imām Ḥusayn’s heroic act manifest the divine honor. Some of these are mentioned here.

Honorableness and opposition to oppression

Showing overt opposition to vices in order to change them

The honor and majesty of Islam relies on the promotion of good and prevention of evil, which becomes an obligatory deed in three levels, namely detestation in heart, verbal disapproval, and practical opposition. With regard to Yazīd’s reign, Imām Ḥusayn (a) did not deem detestation in heart or verbal disapproval to be sufficient. Rather, he considered it his duty to change the vices that stemmed from such a government. Changing the vice is different from the prohibition of evil, as he said in his way to Karbala:

“O’ people! The Prophet of Allāh (s) said: If a person observes that an oppressive ruler makes licit what God has made illicit, breaks the divine covenant, opposes the sunna of the Prophet of Allāh (s), and treats the servants of God oppressively, but he does not oppose him with his words and acts, it is apt for God to throw him into the place of that oppressive ruler [i.e. the Hell]. … O’ people! This group [i.e. Umayyads] has bound themselves to obey Satan and disobey God, have made the corruption public, and have suspended the divine limits. They have made the public treasury exclusive to themselves, have made licit what God has made illicit and illicit what God has made licit, and I [as the grandson of the Prophet of Allāh (s)] am the most appropriate to rise to change this situation” (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 6: 215).

Therefore, being free from dishonoring chains of the worldly life – such as money, tribal relations, and children – Imām Ḥusayn (a) rejected the proposal to swear allegiance to Yazīd with the sentence “A person like me never swears allegiance to a person like Yazīd” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 325) and based on the logic “No, by God, I will never swear allegiance to them and will never flee like the slaves” (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 7: 425). This way, he announced his opposition to Yazīd and asserted that the honorable conduct that leads to death is superior to a life with dishonor:

“God, the Prophet, the believers, the clean souls, and the free people deem dishonor far from us, and do not want us to prefer obedience to the
mean people to the honorable falling on the soil. Beware that we will fight along this small group of helpers” (Muḥammadī Ray Shahrī, 2011: 478).

He says also in his speech: “I do not see death but bliss and life along the oppressors but shame and dishonor” (Ibid.: 192).

Despite what he had heard about his martyrdom from the Prophet (s) and the indications that showed if he did not swear allegiance, he would be killed, Imām Ḥusayn (a) firmly refrained from swearing allegiance to Yazīd and chose the second way (Ṭabarfī, 1990, vol. 7: 2968).

**Frequent disclosures about the enemy**

In response to Yazīd’s reign, Imām not only refrained from swearing allegiance to him, but also used overt disclosures to reveal the personality of Yazīd. After he refrained from swearing allegiance in a private meeting, he attended a public meeting and said:

“O’ the ruler! We are the prophetic family, and the mine of the prophetic mission, and our family is where the angels commute and the divine grace is revealed. God started Islam with us, and he will continue it with our lineage to the end. But Yazīd is a wine-drinker whose hands are dyed with the innocent people’s blood. He is a person who has broken the divine orders and perpetrates corruption in front of the people’s eyes. Is it admissible for a person like me to swear allegiance to such a corrupt person?!" (Khārazmī, 2006: 183).

**Giving extra chances and ultimatum to enemy**

Although Imām stood against the enemy with utmost robustness and even threw away Ibn Ziyād’s letter without answering it (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 383), he waited for appropriate opportunity in different occasions to admonish the enemies as much as possible so that no one among them remain uninformed and take part in killing Imām due to the propaganda against Imām and his family and fall into the misery due to ignorance and lack of information.

Imām sometimes invited people to private or public meetings, gave lectures at other times, wrote letters at still other times to assure the hearts of his helpers, and talked about his righteousness to the people who were in doubt if he or Yazīd is right. He even tried to guide people who he knew were standing against the right intentionally and due to their enmity. However, when he saw that they did not accompany him, he said:

“Now that you don’t help me, get away from this land so that in the ‘Āshūrā day you don’t hear me crying ‘Is there anyone to help me?’ and do not get afflicted with the divine punishment” (ibid.: 379).
Events such as Imām’s invitation of ‘Ubaydullāh b. Ḥurr and ‘Amr b. Qays in Banī Muqātil resting site on his way from Mecca to Karbala, his lectures before and after the noon prayer on the ‘Āshūrā day to the army of Ḥurr (ibid.: 375), his notes to the notables of Kufa such as Sulaymān b. Ṣurad, Mussayyib, and Rufā’a, and his invitation of Zuhayr b. Qayn for a private meeting in the Zarwūd resting site (Muhammadi Ray Shahrī, 2009: 174) are all evidences for this claim. He even addressed ‘Umar b. Sa’d and said:

“Woe to you Ibn Sa’d! Don’t you fear God? You fight me while you know who I am. Leave that group and accompany me; this is closer to the proximity of God” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 388).

He told the army of ‘Umar b. Sa’d:

“O’ people! Listen to my words and do not haste in killing me so that I can give a quality sermon and tell you the reason I came here. Then, if you accept my reason and act fairly, you will be blissful and will stop fighting [me], because you have no reason for it” (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 7: 3022).

He also said:

“Fear God and do not kill me, because you have no permission to kill me and affront my family. I am the [grand]son of your prophet, and Khadija, my grandmother, was the wife of your prophet. You might have heard this saying of the Prophet: Hasan and Husayn are the master of the Paradise youths” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 5).

Patience and recommendation to resistance

Patience is one of the means for the maintenance of honor, freedom from carnal desires, and satisfaction with the divine decree. Therefore, Imām Husayn (a) asked his family at the height of battle and difficulties on the ‘Āshūrā day to show patience in order to maintain their honor and dignity, and recommended them: “So do not say something with your tongue that reduces your value” (Dashtī, 2002: 360). In addition, in his last will told to Umm Kulthūm, Zaynab, and Ruqayya, he said:

“I invite you to the fear of God [the God of deserts and phenomena]. I recommend you to patience against disasters, and the restraint of anger at the time of difficulties” (ibid.: 358).

In the last moments of his life (when he had fallen on the ground with an awfully wounded body), he said:

“I patiently submit to Your decree, O’ Allāh the one and only God. O’ the Helper of the oppressed, there is no God other than You and no worshipped other than You. I patiently submit to
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your decree, the Helper of the Oppressed” (Makārim Shīrāzī, ‘Āshūrā, 2007: 488).

He bravedly made honorable acts while he was always decisive, trusted God, and did not show any weakness. The narrator says in this regard:

“By God, I have not seen anyone like him; his children and helpers had been killed, but despite all those pains and agonies, he bravely fought in the battlefield” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 50).

Removing the sworn allegiance from the companions

Imām did not intend to absorb forces and increase the number of his fighters through mundane promises in order to achieve a seeming victory. Rather, in order not to be indebted to anyone or not to see some of them fleeing the battlefield or defecting to the enemy ranks, Imām let the people who accompanied him and even Banī Hāshim and his own children to choose if they wanted to stay with him and get martyred or leave his caravan. This way, only the purest would remain. For example, when he heard the reports of the martyrdom of Muslim b. ‘Aqīl and his army knew their potential fate, he told them: “Those who like [to stay] can be with me and those who want [to leave] can leave” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 322). Then he said:

“O’ people! Any of you who can stand the sharpness of sword and the wound of spear might stay with us; otherwise, he might leave. Anyone who wants can leave me. Nothing I have on them [i.e. I remove their sworn allegiance]. Use the darkness of night and leave me” (ibid.).

Even at the night before ‘Āshūrā, he reminded people: “Beware! I allow you to leave me. You have no allegiance with me anymore. Use the darkness of night and set it as your easy-paced camel and go.” He also said: “They do not want anyone but me. You did what was upon you. You are free to go” (Muhammadī Ray Shahrī, 2011: 244).

Honor and the observation of morality

Fulfilling promises

The fulfillment of promises is one of the highly stressed divine obligations – as in the verse “… and keep your promise. Surely, the promise will be questioned” (Qur’ān 17:34) – and has a special status. No one has the right to breach his promise. However, if it is proved that the other party has a plot and scheme or has breached his promise, it is not obligatory to fulfill such a promise. Despite this, although it seemed definitive on Imām’s way from Mecca to Karbala that the grounds were not ready for the victory of his army, he continued moving ahead due to his promise to the people of Kufa. When confronted by the Hurr army, he said:
“I did not move toward you but because of the flow of your [written] invitations and salutations to me. If you are loyal to those invitations, now that I have come to you, you should make a strong covenant with me, and make me more assured of your cooperation. But if you are dissatisfied with me coming here, I am ready to go back to the place I have come from” (Ibn Athīr, 2012: 2218 & 2220).

In his dialogue with Ṭarramāḥ b. ‘Uday Ṭā’ī, Imām said: “There is a promise and covenant between us and the people of Kufa, and so, it is not possible for us to return” (ibid.: 2222).

**The restraint of anger and the observation of fairness toward the enemy**

The verse “Those who … restrain anger, and pardon (all) men…” (Qur’ān 4:134) describes the pious people as those who have a good relationship with people for the sake of God. They not only are not greedy for the property of people, but also pay charity. They restrain their anger caused by their personal rights, no matter if they are happy or in difficulty, and they forgive people’s bad deeds. Therefore, Kādīm is one who restrains his anger although he has the ability to avenge and remove the cause of his anger; he overcomes his desires, shows restraint, and prevents the consequences of his anger (Jawādī Āmulī, 2009: 557). Therefore, in one of the resting sites on his way to Karbala, Imām Ḥusayn (a) ordered his companions to give water to the army of Ḥurr and their horses to quench their thirst. Even one of the members of Ḥurr’ army who was left behind and was more thirsty and tired than others was given water by Imām himself (Qumī, 2001: 283). It is noted in history that Imām even said: “Give water to these people, and water their horses little by little so that they are not damaged by impulsive drinking of water” (Ibn Athīr, 2012: 2217).

**Constructive forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a level higher than anger restraint and is closer to piety. It also leads to bigger honor. It is narrated from the noble Prophet (s): “Forgive because forgiving adds to the honor of the Servant [of God]. So, forgive each other so that God honors you” (Kulaynī, 2009, vol. 2: 108). The true examples of the forgivers are the Imāms (a), as Zurārā says: “I heard Abā Ja’far said: the magnanimity of our family is in that we forgive anyone who does an oppressive act to us” (Ṣadūq, n.d.: 12). Therefore, despite all annoyances and threats made by Ḥurr and his army toward Imām Ḥusayn (a) and his family, when Ḥurr came to him and told: “I am now remorseful of what I did, and I have repented to God. Do you see my repentance to God to be acceptable?” Imām Husayn (a) said: “God accepts you and forgives you” (Qumī, 2001: 310).
Respecting the enemy’s familial relationships
When Shimr brought a safe-conduct to the children of Umm al-Banin, he called them loudly near the tent of Abä ‘Abdullāh. No one answered him. Imām said: “Answer Shimr even though he is corrupt, because he belongs to the tribe of your mother” (Dashtī, 2002: 34).

Defending the female members of his family
The human values, including chastity, are the fixed ethical principles that are not limited to a certain time and the believer maintains them strongly and robustly under any conditions. As Imām Ḥusayn (a) in his last moments in the battle field, when he couldn’t even ride his horse, had an badly wounded body, and was unable to defend himself, noted that Yazīd’s army had come between him and the tents of his family, he could not tolerate this and shouted: “Woe to you the followers of Abū Sufyān! If you don’t have faith and do not fear the Resurrection Day, at least be free in this world and act based on the conduct of your forefathers, if you claim to be Arab.” When Shimr Said: “What do you say?” Imām said: “I fight you and you might fight with me; but women are innocent. So keep the disobedient and unwise members of your army away from my family till I am alive” (Majlīṣī, 2019, vol. 44: 51).

The real honor and authority and winning the companions’ hearts
One of the features of the divine honor is the real and permanent authority over hearts, and Imām Ḥusayn (a) succeeded in winning the hearts of others, one that will not be ended to the end of the human existence (Tihrānī, 2012: 197). An evidence for this happened at the night before ‘Āshūrā, when he told his companions about their death the next day and said: “I will be killed tomorrow and you will also be killed,” and all of them said: “Thank God that gave us the honor to help you and bestowed upon us dignity with being killed in your way” (Dashtī, 2002: 17). Then, Sa‘īd b. ‘Abdullāh and Zuhayr b. Qayn said: “By God, if we know that we will be killed, then we will be revived and then will be burned and our ashes will go with wind and this is done to us seventy times, we will not get away from you so that we can die in your presence” (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 7: 3016).

Imām Ḥusayn described his companions as men “whose love of death is more than the love of a child to his mother’s breast”; that is, their life goes on while they have an eye on death, and they live as if they are moving toward death (Mīr Bāqirī, 2013: 165).
Honor and guardianship: sacrificing one’s property and life as well as the lives of one’s family
In order to protect Islam, Imām Ḥusayn (a) not only gave his own life and properties, but also sacrificed his family for this cause, including his brothers, nephews, and his own children, even his six-month-old son.

Honor, obedience, and absolute servitude
Since Imām Ḥusayn (a) is at the height of religious knowledge and religiosity and is really Abā Abdullāh, i.e. the father of the servitude of Allāh and the height of servitude, he sent ‘Abbās to ‘Umar b. Sa’d’s army at the night before Tāsū’ā and said:

“Go to them. If you can, postpone the war so that we can say prayers to God and ask for His forgiveness; He knows that I love prayer” (Muḥammadī Ray Shahrī, 2011: 494).

Abū Thamāma Ṣaydāwī (Ṣāyidī) told Imām at the noon of ‘Āshūrā: “I like to visit my God while I have said this prayer whose time is due now.” Imām said: “Ask them to leave us alone [i.e. stop fighting] so that we can say prayers” (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 7: 3042).

When he wanted to go to the battlefield, he said: “To Allāh we belong, and to Him is our return,” and when he attacked, he said: “Allāh is the greatest.” After making an attack, he stood on a high place and said: “Allāh is the greatest. There is no power and might other than that of Allāh, the Sublime, the Glorified” (Tihrānī, 2012: 138).

Finally, in his last prayer in his martyrdom site, he said: “I am Your absolute servant and You are the absolute Worshipped, and it is the requirement of the servanthood to be satisfied with the pleasure of Allāh” (ibid.: 335). Then, in that situation, after putting his bloody face on soil, he said: “In the name of Allāh, and by Allāh, and in the way of Allāh, and on the religion of the messenger of Allāh” (Majlisī, 2019, vol. 44: 53).

The different aspects of the manifestation of divine honor in Imām Ḥusayn’s (a) heroic act
1. The true honor is one of the positive Divine Names that originally belongs to God, as the verse “…to Allāh belongs the honor wholly…” (Qur’ān 35:10) puts it. Therefore, no one is honorable other than God, and it is the honor of God that is manifested in others. Consequently, Imām Ḥusayn (a) is a manifestation of a Divine Name.
2. Since the sublime God promotes the good and prevents the evil – as stipulated in the verse “Allāh commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin …” (Qur’ān 16:90) – Imām Ḥusayn (a) became a manifestation of a Divine Name because of his effort to promote the good and prevent the evil.

3. One of the manifestations of the divine honor and Divine Names is “forgiveness.” Therefore, anyone who waives his personal right and forgives a person liable to punishment for the sake of God, he becomes a manifestation of one of the Divine Names. Consequently, Imām Ḥusayn (a) became a manifestation of the Names “Forgiver” and “Honorable” because he forgave the enemy.

4. A requirement for honorableness is to give up the worldly facilities and give one’s assets and life for the sake of God. In this regard, Imām Ḥusayn (a) did not withhold giving his life, assets, and family for the cause of God.

5. According to the verse “And (moreover) He hath put affection between their hearts: not if thou hadst spent all that is in the earth, couldst thou have produced that affection, but Allāh hath done it: for He is Exalted in might, Wise” (Qur’ān :63), putting affection between hearts can be done only by the Honorable and Wise God, and Imām Ḥusayn (a) put affection between his own heart and those of his companions such as Hurr, Jawn, Zuhary, ‘Ābis, etc. in the light of the honor he received from God, and this made those companions honorable, too.

Other issues such as the continuation of Imāmat in his lineage, and the existence of blessings in the soil he is buried in, his holy shrine, and in the act of visiting his shrine (‘Āmilī, n.d., vol. 5: 363, vol. 8: 313, & vol. 16: 395), the continuation of mourning for his martyrdom until now, the weakening of Umayyad reign and its later extinction, the revival of Islam and its values such as readiness for self-sacrifice and martyrdom-seeking as well as readiness for the promotion of good and prevention of evil (Tehrānī, 2012: 220) are all the manifestations of the true divine honor and authority and Imām Ḥusayn’s (a) authority during the history.

**Conclusion**

God is honorable and is the origin of honor. He bestows honor onto those who have piety and servitude.

As the believers belong to God, they are also honorable. However, a person who has achieved the Imāmat level is at the highest degree of honorableness.
Imâm Ḥusayn (a) who had the Imâmat honor could not stand the dishonor of swearing allegiance to Yazîd. While acting robustly against the enemy, he asked them for the a time to say prayers.

Imâm Ḥusayn (a) treated the enemy fairly and forgave them while he was at the height of resistance. Moreover, by winning the hearts of his companions, he introduced the true authority. He interpreted the life and death through his honorable death and became unforgettable.

As ‘Āshûrâ is a culture, a constant movement, and a permanent role-model for the Muslim nation, today is the day when the Muslim nations should not get scared or doubted in the face of the seeming powerful façade of the Global Arrogance.

It is upon us to rely on the narration from the noble Prophet (s) that introduces Ahl al-Bayt as the saving ship and says: “Anyone who boards it is saved and anyone who does not is drowned.” Acting based on the conduct of those ever-honorable notables, we might live honorably and die honorably.
References