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History does not teach fatalism. There are moments when the will of a handful of free men breaks through determinism and opens up new roads. ~Charles de Gaulle

Human civilization has existed for over 5,000 years. It has witnessed painful natural catastrophes, tragic world wars, deliberate genocides, tyranny, oppression, and every calamity and misfortune imaginable to the human mind. And yet today, we are still in the middle of a war in which hundreds of civilians die each day; extreme poverty persists in most regions of the world; and human rights are continually repressed. With this multitude of problems, it may seem that any strategy towards world peace is impossible. Yet we must only look to the grandson of the Prophet, Imam Hussein (pbuh), to witness how much change is possible with the efforts of one person. Irregardless of the obstacles facing him, Imam Hussein ventured on a journey to uphold truth and defeat falsehood. As Imam Hussein shows, to conquer any grand problem, the first step is to conquer oneself. The Quran narrates that, "*Verily, Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their heart*" (13:11). Only through our active attempts to stand up for what is right will we be able to alter the conscience of those around us. Imam Hussein went through a tragedy and heartbreak which arguably surpasses the hardship and adversity befallen on any person in the history of mankind. Yet he chose his fate willingly so that his message of righteousness may be carried on. Instead of pledging allegiance to a corrupt ruler, Imam Hussein battled to the last breath for justice.

Imam Hussein voiced his message of freedom through active participation in contemporary politics. And despite his noble efforts to alter the current events of his time, it is truly sad that we as American Muslims have not adopted his way of life. As the Muslim community in America, we are drastically underrepresented in the political sphere. Imam Hussein struggled till the moment of death so that the generations after him would know that he, and any Muslim after him, must fight for what is right in any capacity possible. As Americans, we can follow his example by being politically active. It is absolutely essential that we participate wholeheartedly in the policy-making of this country. For some indescribable reason, we have fallen into a slumber and forgotten our responsibilities as citizens of this nation. Although Muslims in America have done well financially, we have concentrated most of our energies on personal gain, whether that consists of giant strides in our careers or living comfortable family lives. Unfortunately, there is a mentality among Muslims which is unnervingly similar to that of the 18,000 Kufans who betrayed Imam Hussein in his time of need: "Somebody else will do it." Imam Hussein, whose very birth was a gift to mankind and a blessing to the earth, sacrificed every personal comfort in order to fight for freedom. Even Charles Dickens notes that in bringing "his sister, wife, and children... [Imam Hussein] sacrificed purely for Islam" (http://www.al-imam.net/muh1428_flyer.pdf).

After recalling the sacrifice of a man who gave up everything which he could possibly value in order to further the message of Islam, how can we so conspicuously deny our own political responsibilities? Imam Hussein was a brilliant political tactician. As Dr. Akhtar points out, the location picked for the battle and the selection of soldiers were excellently chosen in order to proliferate the message in its truest sense while

attracting maximum sympathy (Akhtar). In the scorching deserts of Kerbala, where only those who are sincerest of faith could fight, Imam Hussein led his band of dedicated followers. The soldiers were selected not for their physical abilities (the men ranged from a six month-old baby to a 90 year old man); they were chosen for their moral strength and their will to sacrifice themselves for something grander and nobler. These men sought to change the world in the name of Islam.

Although Imam Hussein's army was massacred, it is important that we do not misinterpret his dilemma. Imam Hussein has often been depicted a helpless man who was the victim of unimaginable hardship with no means of escape from his predicament. However, this illustration is a vast misrepresentation of the mission embarked upon by Imam Hussein. Instead, we should understand the tragedy of Kerbala as a voluntary fight by the Imam with knowledge of his physical defeat, but firm belief in the proliferation of his moral message. This was a fight which symbolized a struggle against injustice to its utmost extent. With this dedication in mind, we can guide ourselves to remain vigilant and fight injustice at all times.

It may often be convenient to follow society's actions, but to truly follow the example of Imam Hussein, we must cease to rest in our comfort zone and reach outside our self-imposed boundaries. We each have something to give. In the political realm, this means that we as Muslims must write to our senators urging them to stop using our tax dollars for the murder of innocent civilians in Iraq, the illegal creation of secret interrogation facilities, construction of the Israeli Apartheid Wall, and other such policies we disagree with. It is a shame if we don't speak up for what we believe in, especially since our beloved Imam, the leader of the youths of paradise, died for what he believed

in. Every person has a potential to break through determinism and open up a new path. We all have something to contribute, as long as we perform to the best of our ability.

The first step every Muslim in America must take is to register to vote. As a united voting bloc, we can make a substantial difference in the upcoming elections and gear our nation towards a path more suitable to Islamic moral values. It is also important that Muslims read the news everyday and are informed of global politics. Awareness of global issues will allow us to work for global peace and freedom for the oppressed to the best of our abilities. For students of my generation, it is vital that we aspire to become professionals in careers outside of medicine or engineering. As professors, we can seek knowledge and add credibility to our claims through scholarship. As journalists, we can offer Muslim perspectives which may otherwise be denied. As authors, we can disseminate ideas to the general public. It is incredibly important to reach out and make our voices heard through unconventional means. Imam Hussein's message was conveyed by the brilliant speeches of Bibi Zainab (pbuh). She broke the stereotype of women of her generation by speaking out and making her voice heard, despite all the hardship she endured. We must not remain silent.

The Iraq War is a specific example of something every American Muslim should care for and try to change. As an American Muslim, I find the daily killings of innocent Iraqi civilians shocking and disturbing. I don't sympathize with these civilians because they are Iraqi or because they are Muslim; more important than any sort of cultural connection is the fact that these people belong to humanity. We cannot and should not accept the injustice these people face every moment of their lives. Taking proactive steps, such as signing the Muslim Code of Honor, are important building blocks in reducing

enmity between Muslim brothers and restoring peace in Iraq. However, this is only a start. We must also address our attention towards the people who are dying daily. We need to take more direct action in halting the turmoil in Iraq. As a relatively affluent Muslim community, one feasible solution would be to engage in micro-financing. By loaning (or donating, if possible) small amounts of money to those in dire need, we can at least ease a small portion of the burden carried by the Iraqi people. Although this is a relatively new idea in the field of economics, Islam has always promoted micro-financing. According to the Shari'a, it is illegal to charge interest for any loans, so by participating in micro-financing we will be partaking in both a revolutionary idea in economics while also fulfilling our Islamic duties. Another way American Muslims can participate is by collecting clothes and sending them to non-profit organizations in Iraq. Besides this, we can organize protests, make flyers, and do a number of other things. The point is that we must act immediately, in whatever method and capacity possible. Imam Hussein did not wait around for somebody else to take action, and neither should we.

It is unfortunate that Muslims receive so much negative publicity in the media today. Muslims are depicted as a violent people who breed terrorists; many viewers lash out against this negative portrayal by committing violent acts, and the media coverage becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is our duty to correct the impressions created by the media. We can do this through our careers, or on a more personal level by reaching out to our friends and neighbors and showing them a truly Islamic lifestyle by example. Yazid tried to demean Imam Hussein in any and every way possible so that the Muslim people would harbor enmity towards the Imam; however, Imam Hussein retaliated only by offering a glass of water to his enemies. When someone can offer a drink to the men who

would abuse his wives and daughters, what prevents us from extending this kindness to our friends and neighbors? Building peace is only possible through understanding. Once we bridge these gaps on a community level, success will be possible in the international realm.

With the theological belief in Imam Hussein's moral infallibility, his role in our daily lives is virtually undisputable. We should look to him in each moment of success and every instance of failure. If we speak up and work on the community level with even a fraction of the dedication exhibited by Imam Hussein, we will be able to instill social change. Moral righteousness and international peace are achievable only through the efforts of individuals like us. We cannot hope for somebody else to solve the problems affecting the rest of the world. We must remember that all people and histories are intertwined because we all belong to humanity, and therefore we must assume responsibility of global issues and prevent apathy towards current events. By immersing ourselves within the political domain, it will be possible to make a difference in the world, even if only on a miniscule scale. As citizens of the United States, a nation which holds a unique position of power in the world and promotes unparalleled freedom to its people, it is in our hands to make lives better for other people. Imam Hussein died knowing that his message will inspire revolutionary change in the hearts of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As Edward Gibbon writes, "The story of Imam Hussein will awaken sympathy even in the mind of the coldest reader."

As the followers of our beloved Imam, we have not a second to waste. Only we can change our history for generations to come.

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