

## Zainab's Lament in Damascus

Note: The tenth day of the month of Muharram marks the martyrdom of Hussain (Prophet Muhammad's grandson) and his followers in the desert of Karbala — a word with the same metaphoric resonance for a Muslim that Calvary has for a Christian. Commemorating the martyrdom is the central rite of Shiite Islam, so central that even at ordinary funerals elegies for the martyrs are woven into grief for the dead. Hussain's sister Zainab, a witness to the massacre, was taken prisoner.

Over Hussain's mansion what night has fallen?  
 Look at me, O people of Shaam, the Prophet's  
 only daughter's daughter, his only child's child.  
 Over my brother's

bleeding mansion dawn rose — at such forever  
 cost? So weep now, you who of passion never  
 made a holocaust, for I saw his children  
 slain in the desert,

crying for water. Hear me. Remember Hussain,  
 what he gave in Karbala, he the severed  
 heart, the very heart of Muhammad, left there  
 bleeding, unburied.

Deaf Damascus, here in your Caliph's dungeons  
 where they mock the blood of your Prophet, I'm an  
 orphan, Hussain's sister, a tyrant's prisoner.  
*Father of Clay*, he

cried, *Forgive me. Syria triumphs, orphans  
 all your children. Farewell.* And then he wore his  
 shroud of words and left us alone forever.  
 Paradise, hear me —

On my brother's body what night has fallen?  
Let the rooms of Heaven be deafened, Angels,  
with my unheard cry in the Caliph's palace:  
*Syria hear me*

*Over Hussain's mansion what night has fallen*

*I alone am left to tell my brother's story*

*On my brother's body what dawn has risen*

Weep for my brother  
*World, weep for Hussain*

AGHA SHAHID ALI