

Story 1079 (1980 Tape 1

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Rescuing the Head of Hüseyin¹, *NY*

Hüseyin was the grandson of Mohammed. He was killed in the war and was considered a martyr. After he had been killed, his enemies cut off his head and began playing football with it. They were kicking it all around the field.

As this was going on, a woman came along and asked them, "Whose head is that that you are kicking around?"

They answered, "This is the head of Imam² Hüseyin.

¹Hüseyin (628-680) was the younger son of Ali, Fourth Caliph. Ali's relegation to being the fourth rather than the first successor of Mohammed (Ali's cousin and father-in-law), plus his subsequent assassination, plus the forced abdication of his older son Hasan, Fifth Caliph, plus the massacre of Hüseyin and a small band of followers trying to repossess the caliphate--all of these events brought about the Shi'ite Schism which split Islam and continues to split it to this day.

Ali was murdered at Kufa (present-day Iraq); Hüseyin was slaughtered at Karbala or Kerbala (also Iraq); after being forced from the caliphate, the older son, Hasan, returned to his home in Medina (present-day Saudi Arabia), where he died shortly afterwards, probably of poisoning by his enemies. All three are considered Shi'ite martyrs.

The most poignant and celebrated martyrdom was that of Hüseyin. His martyrdom is commemorated annually on the 10th day of the month of Muharrem on the Hegira calendar. (The martyrdom occurred on October 10, 680, or the 10th of Muharrem in the Hegira year 61.) This is an annual day of mourning, rituals of lamentation, and, at the climax, the presentation of Ashura, a passion play.

²An imam is a prayer leader, but Hüseyin was much more than that: he was the Pretender to the caliphate.

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When the woman heard this, she said to herself, my God, what can I do about this? Let me rescue the head of Hüseyin by finding another head with which to replace it." This woman had a son at home. Going there, she killed her son and cut off his head. This she hoped to be able to substitute somehow for the head of Hüseyin. She sacrificed her own son's life in order to rescue head of Hüseyin because he was the grandson of Mohammed and that one person of all humanity whom God loved best.

She took her son's head to the playing field where they were kicking about the head of Hüseyin. There she shouted, "Bring Hüseyin's head to me! He once insulted me deeply, and I want to take my revenge against him now!" When they brought her the head of Hüseyin, she took it and sat upon it. Then when she pretended to give it back to the men, she substituted the head of her son for it. In this way she rescued the head of Hüseyin.

This tale is told by many different storytellers. People always want to hear this tale told again.