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TA'ZIYEH RITUAL AND DRAMA IN IRAN

Edited by

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Foreword

It would be commonplace to say that tradition, both good and bad, is being swept away by the onslaught of technology and modernism. We need not concern ourselves here with the reasons except to inquire: is this because of a hatred for the impoverished conditions of yesteryear's living, or because of an eagerness to embrace new Western ways, or because of an inherent weakness of the traditions themselves—or possibly a combination of the three? What is definite is that the third world, with the exception of miraculous Japan (these monks that brew modern electronics) and to a certain extent India, is giving up its traditions.

I am certain that if students of anthropology had turned to Ta'ziyeh forty-eight years ago when it was banned by the Iranian Government for sociopolitical reasons, a major share of the Iranian National Theatre today would be plays (with or without religious subject-matter) directly derived from Ta'ziyeh: but much to our regret, this was not the case. Ta'ziyeh had almost been isolated in certain distant villages when individual Iranian scholars such as Bahram Baizai (1965), Mayel Baktash and myself (1971) began to turn their attention to it.

In the autumn of 1959 a Ta'ziyeh fragment was included in Parviz

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An Analysis of the Ta'ziyeh of Qasem

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A summary of the adventure which unfolds in this Ta'ziyeh¹ is as follows: Ali Akbar, youthful son of Imam Hussein, has just been martyred. Qasem, son of Iman Hassan and a handsome youth who is betrothed to Imam Hussein's daughter, decides that he, too, must go to the battlefield. Hussein, as commander-in-chief, considers the boy not eligible to fight. Not only is he the living memory of Hussein's brother, Imam Hassan, but also he is not of legal age to participate in a *Jihad*.

Qasem, restless in his desire to assert his manhood and bear witness to his faith, becomes melancholy. He seeks out his brother Abd Allah for consolation and together they lament his misfortune, believing that Hussein, by refusing him permission to join arms, has slighted them. This thought reminds them of their own orphaned state and their thoughts turn to the murder of their father. Qasem's mother finds him depressed and agitated, and asks him why he is crying. "Although the fields of misfortune are filled with grief and suffering, this is no time for tears," she says. "You must secure Hussein's permission to join in the *Jihad* and make ready for battle." Qasem replies that Hussein has refused him.

His mother comforts him and reminds him of Imam Hussein's benevolence. Qasem, tears welling in his throat, sends her to plead his cause with the Imam. She does so, but again the Imam refuses. "How can I?" he says.

"How can I send him? He is the living memory of my brother Hassan, an unwed boy in the flower of his youth who has not yet tasted the pleasures of life."

Finally, moved by her brave and selfless pleadings, Imam Hussein changes his mind. "I will go to console him," he says. "You prepare for his wedding celebration." These last words startle and surprise Qasem's mother.

Hussein summons Zainab his sister. Her heart too is heavy with grief. "Ali Akbar's body is bathed in blood," he says. "There can be no room for joy and mirth." Hussein answers that the marriage was the final wish of Qasem's father. "How can I, at the last moment, ignore this wish and send the son of my brother, unrequited and unfulfilled, to the field of battle? Go, Zainab, and speak with Fatemeh."

Zainab goes to Fatemeh and explains to her her father's wishes. Fatemeh answers that her own brother has just been killed and lies weltering in his own blood. "How can I who am wearing black ready myself for feasting and pleasure?" Zainab responds that circumstances demand it. If the young tree of Islam is to grow and be fruitful the marriage must take place. Fatemeh, when presented with this logic, accepts. She recognizes that her wedding is a responsibility of critical importance.

Suddenly, a riderless horse bursts upon the scene. It is the horse of Ali Akbar. Fatemeh lets out a wail that reaches the heavens.

Zainab goes to Imam Hussein and informs him of Fatemeh's concurrence. The Imam tells Qasem's mother that the wedding must take place. She responds that no one in the world has ever seen a bridegroom with blood instead of henna rubbed into his palms, a bridegroom whose nuptial bed is like the petals of a flower borne away by the cruel winds of villainy and injustice. But Hussein replies that it is a fact of our existence which in all its variety and shapes continues to flow on under the ebony wheel.

Qasem's mother exclaims that since Ali Akbar is dead and Um-e Laila, his mother, is in mourning, wedding festivities should not be arranged. "It is not right," she says. But Hussein orders her to go to Um-e Laila and to use her power of persuasion to convince her that festivities must take place and that Laila herself must prepare for the wedding. She finds Laila sobbing violently, strewing pieces of straw over her head in anguish. She begs her to cease mourning. Laila, while groaning and beating her breast, congratulates Qasem's mother on the wedding.

In accordance with Iranian tradition, Qasem's mother asks Laila to color her palms with henna and to lay aside her black mourning clothes because, as she says, mourning can change nothing. Hussein sends Zainab to Laila to beg her to cease grieving and to accept Qasem's mother's invitation.

Next, Hussein tells Zainab to prepare the nuptial chamber for Qasem's bride. Again, Qasem's mother bursts into tears. Ali Akbar's bridegroom's

costume is brought forth and Hussein dresses Qasem in it. He orders Zainab to rub henna into the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet of both young people. The preparations for the wedding celebration are now complete. Zainab bears henna, sweets, rose water, and a robe of honor to Fatemeh. She bids her don the wedding dress and in sorrowful tones expresses her happiness with the wedding. Then, Zainab rubs Fatemeh's hands with henna while Qasem's mother does the same for him. Next, at Hussein's command and in accordance with ancient Persian custom, Zainab tells Fatemeh to mount Ali Akbar's horse, Eagle, that Eagle might bear her to the bridal chamber.

Fatemeh refuses to mount. She tells Zainab to go back to her father with the message that she cannot bear to ride the horse of her martyred young brother. Zainab, with tears streaming down her face, lovingly strokes Ali Akbar's horse, caressing him in Ali Akbar's memory. She tells Hussein what has transpired. Hussein is deeply touched. In anguish over his remembrances of Akbar, of Akbar's voice, of Akbar's hair, of Akbar's eyes and of Akbar's physique, Hussein summons Zainab and agrees that Fatemeh is right. He orders his own horse, Zuljanah, to be brought to Fatemeh. The horse is draped in black. Fatemeh mounts Zuljanah and departs for the bridal chamber regretting all the while that her marital chamber is not a graveyard.

Everyone congratulates one another on Qasem's happiness and all join in the celebration. Imam Hussein even sends sweets in the form of cone-shaped sugar to his enemies Shemr and Umar Sa'd. The bride and groom leave for the bridal chamber. Fatemeh laments that whereas the lyre and the harp are customarily played at weddings, for hers only the drums of war sound.

Brief moments pass. Then Qasem, aware of the bitter fate which awaits him and his bride, takes leave of her. Fatemeh cries out, "Do not be so unfaithful! Do not leave me!" He responds that the consummation of a marriage is impossible under such circumstances and that they must content themselves with this. "See how alone Hussein is as battle nears. Perhaps our marital union shall occur at the Judgment Day."

The discussion turns to the Judgment Day. The bride asks the groom to give her a token so that she may recognize him at the resurrection; Qasem replies that she will recognize him by his rent sleeves, his torn body bleeding from one hundred wounds and his eyes wet with sorrow, marching in the service of her father.

Qasem's mother, bent and stooped by sorrow, feels great anxiety over the imminent departure of her unfulfilled son. She asks him to forgive her for any shortcomings she might have had in raising him. She calls him her brave son and pronounces him worthy of her milk.

Prince Abd Allah, Iman Hassan's other young son, tearfully asks Qasem, "How can I live without you?" Qasem replies, "I entrust you to my

aunt." He summons Zainab and places the hands of Prince Abd Allah and those of his mother into hers. He then tells Hussein that he is ready for battle. Hussein wraps a shroud over Qasem's wedding clothes. This is the honorary authorization which Qasem had so desired.

Qasem returns to his bride one last time to bid her farewell. How painful it is for Fatemeh to say goodbye forever! Qasem gives his mother his last will and testament which specifies how his bride should be cared for and then departs for the battlefield. Hussein prays for Qasem and asks his followers to bless his prayers by uttering the word amen. They do so.

Qasem arrives at the battlefield full of vigor. He fights single-handedly and courageously. At last, the fatal moment comes when he falls from his horse, wounded and helpless. Shemr stands over him with his sword drawn. Qasem begs Shemr to allow him to see the face of his sweetheart just one last time. But Shemr rejects his plea, turns to Umar Sa'd and asks for permission to cut off his head. "Give him a brief respite," says Umar Sa'd and begins to converse with Qasem who is now in the agony of death. Qasem's last wishes, to see his wife one more time, to see Hussein, and to quench his thirst are never realized. As Shemr prepared to deliver the death blow, Qasem cries out to Hussein, and Hussein, from the middle of a sea of infidel soldiers, rushes to Qasem's side, cradles his head in his arms, and curses his murderers. Finally, Shemr delivers the final blow. Qasem's last request is that Hussein should not carry him back to the tents in this miserable and broken condition, with a bloody and torn body. He is ashamed to be seen by his wife in this condition. Finally, he dies.

Hussein returns to the tents and announces the death. He asks Zainab to dress Fatemeh in black and to go on his behalf to beg the forgiveness of Qasem's mother.

EVENTS PIVOT AROUND HUSSEIN

In this Ta'ziyeh, as in many, Hussein is the center of all action. Everything pivots around his decisions, his thoughts, his wishes, and his words. Sometimes Hussein, alone in the barren desert, laments his terrible loneliness and cries out to his grandfather, the Prophet, against those of his kinsmen who in their weakness have deserted him. "O illustrious Prophet, so laden with fame, No stranger in foreign lands e'er suffered my pain."² He senses how alone he is against the forces of evil. Those who had accompanied him, pledged their friendship, their assistance, and their hospitality, fled when confronted with the awesome wave of catastrophic events. Hussein is so alone that save for the members of his own family who are largely women and children, there is no one he can talk to. Most of his brethren have either defected, broken their covenant, or been martyred. Save for consultation with his women and children, there is little he can do but bemoan his incapacity.

For Hussein, everything is mixed together in this Ta'ziyeh: reason, realism, intelligence, emotion, allegiance to religious and tribal tradition, a sense of responsibility, and most of all, a terrifying and painful tension which casts a shadow over the entire environment of war and violence. The events which have already occurred and the loss of his beloved and devoted friends have distressed him to the depths of his soul. Hussein sometimes appears as the Imam, sometimes as a father who has lost his young son, sometimes as a battlefield commander alone and friendless, sometimes as a great human being, determined and victorious, and sometimes as nothing but an ordinary man who lacks a refuge in which to find shelter.

When Hussein refuses to allow Qasem to go to war, one senses he actually feels the presence of his brother Hassan. Hussein does not consider himself authorized to send his brother's son into battle, since the tragic ending is patently clear.

Hassan had never quarreled with the Umayyads and had himself made the decision that Qasem should be a bridegroom. For these reasons, Hussein is ready to give the boy his own daughter in marriage, hoping that the marriage might forge a new link with Qasem in addition to their already existing bonds of blood, faith, and combat, a new link blessed, yet destined for failure.

The catastrophe peaks when Hussein orders that the bridegroom's clothing of Ali Akbar, his own unfulfilled young son, be worn by Qasem only moments after Ali Akbar has been slain, and orders Fatemeh to mount Ali Akbar's horse. It is as if Hussein, like any broken-hearted father who is still hopeful, determined, and a true Moslem, wishes to experience the presence of his lost child even amidst the sad events which inexorably grind forward. It is as if Hussein either does not—or cannot—accept the fact that his son is dead. Perhaps by these thoughts and actions he wishes to eliminate the distance separating Ali Akbar from Qasem, Fatemeh, and himself, and bridge the distance between the battlefield and death, and the bride and marital union; and hence, via the atmosphere created, to recreate Akbar's voice, Akbar's face, and Akbar's memory in their sweetest and most genuine form. His demand that the wedding take place using Ali Akbar's clothing and his horse Eagle is a manifestation of the humanity of Hussein in his role as a father whose own courageous son has been martyred before he could marry.

Fatemeh's refusal to obey her father's request to mount Ali Akbar's horse is a wonderfully pure, spiritual, and human rebellion, completely Eastern, emotional, and so painful to witness that Hussein, despite his lionheartedness, accepts it and sympathizes with her. He shares her grief. His heart is so overflowing with memories of Ali Akbar that he weeps. Perhaps in no other Ta'ziyeh does Hussein lament and grieve as he does in this one. Is this feeling not aroused by an emotional bond between what is happening, all that has happened, and all that must happen to Qasem and to himself?

Grief dominates this Ta'ziyeh, grief and tears and still more tears. If for a fleeting moment a flash of joy leaps out, it too is rooted in grief and futility, full of high hopes but short-lived, a transitory flash, baseless and without foundation. Joy in this Ta'ziyeh has an aspect of caricature to it. It shows itself with a doleful face as if its inside were empty and its outside were overlaid with sorrow and tragedy. Congratulations and good wishes are spoken against a background of weeping. The moments of joy never achieve enough power to create enthusiasm or delight. A tragedy is unfolding and the transitory, fleeting joy is buried under the weight of catastrophic events. From a distance, death with its despicable face is smiling. Blood is about to flow. Magnanimity has fallen and been trampled by the feet of tyranny. No one can say when, where, or how it will end.

Although the dialogue speaks of conjugal union, the union is not consummated. The dialogue concerns the war and injustice which lie at the end of the road. Is this not the most sorrowful of all love songs? Two young people, eager and full of desire—one facing death in the saddle, the other, defenceless, facing an inexorable fate without a friend. The young lovers' union, occurring as it does amidst a sea of blood, is a farewell pact for eternity.

Despite his youth and inexperience, Qasem realizes that he must die, and he accepts his fate uncomplainingly in the manner of great men. Note his answer to Fatemeh when she inquires how she might recognize him at the Judgment Day:

With sorrowful eyes and sleeves all tattered,
Body ripped open and bones all shattered,
With the other martyrs, Abbas and Akbar,
With thirsting lips, still serving your father.³

Another particularly moving scene comes when Fatemeh watches her father clothe her husband in a shroud and observes the shadow of death fall across his face and body. She cannot bear it and she screams at her father to remove the shroud. Since she considers her spontaneous scream to be blasphemous and rude, she asks Hussein to drape her instead with the shroud. Her emotions are mixed: on the one hand, is fear of death and non-existence coupled with pride and, on the other, a sense of unworthiness in the face of her religion and embarrassment in front of her father, coupled with her hopes for a happily married life.

In the exchange between the two when Fatemeh praises Qasem's father, the meter of the verse shifts its rhythm.

Qasem gives his mother his last will and testament, which pertains to his wife. The will is full of hope in the future, a future in which the questions of when, where, and how are not answered. We sense that although Qasem knows he is leaving forever and has no hope for either life or marriage, he still desires Fatemeh's love, her body, and her soul. He

wants his heart to belong to her even unto death's door, hoping that death will not cause her to forget him but will somehow give a permanence to their love. It is as if he plans to go on a journey and even though the journey is death itself he still retains hope for a safe return.

When the time comes to leave for battle, Qasem bids farewell to all that has been part of him, both tangible and intangible. How he loves life! Even though he is facing inexorable fate, he still hopes to live. It is a painful sight to witness Qasem crying in the arms of his friends, bidding them farewell amidst a silence broken only by the soft beat of drums in the background.

When Qasem leaves for the battlefield, Hussein, bearing a prophetic mission on the fields of Kerbela, cries out "Allah Akbar." This cry for help, this warning, embodies the significance of what has already happened and what is in the process of happening—a young lad, inexperienced, full of hope, a fresh bridegroom full of vigor, a believer and a lover headed for the battlefield. It is as if Hussein by these words hopes to comprehend both the present and the future, and grasp the hugeness of the catastrophe which is enveloping him and his kinsmen. He hopes to make fate hearken to the aloneness and the faithfulness of both himself and his followers. This "Allah Akbar" is an extraordinary call to prayer—a wondrous and wonder-creating cry against the tyranny which governed that hapless land. Hussein's prayer is a prayer of blessing to escort those entrusted to him on their journey. It is full of love, loyalty, and selflessness.

The manly boldness which Qasem exhibits on the battlefield against the leaders of the enemy, Shemr and Umar Sa'd, serves as a full-view mirror which reflects the essence of this unfulfilled youth. Here we see him just as he is, in all his worthiness and humanity, full of hope and greatness. Alone he can do nothing. It is impossible for one person to withstand an onslaught by an enemy horde which is greedy for honors and titles, and has banded together in the hopes of achieving material gain. At last, he falls. The inexorable catastrophe reveals its blood-stained visage to Qasem—pitiless, unyielding, and hateful.

The disregard which Shemr shows toward Qasem's request to see Fatemeh one more time and the sympathy which Umar Sa'd displays point up the righteousness in the soul of his honest youth. Qasem's conversation with Umar Sa'd conveys all of his hopes and fears, his joys and his sorrows—all of which lie exposed to futility and fleeting time. Umar Sa'd, despite his expressions of sympathy, feigns ignorance. He cunningly seals his lips when it comes to discussing the facts which caused Qasem to fight. He knows that Qasem is the son of Hassan and Hussein's son-in-law; he knows that Qasem is a new bridegroom. Most important of all, he knows that right is on the side of Qasem and Hussein. But, despite all he knows, he feigns ignorance. Qasem's pure love for Islam and for his wife is fully revealed in his responses to Umar Sa'd. How chastely he responds to his enemy's questions about his wedding celebration:

Umar Sa'd: To the nuptial chamber with your bride you went.

Qasem: Upon her face mine eyes feasted to the fullest extent.

Umar Sa'd: What words were exchanged with your bride, pray tell?

Qasem: I told her, O my darling, I bid thee farewell.⁴

Perhaps the story of Qasem and Fatemeh is the saddest story of unrequited love ever told in any of the world's greatest tragedies. As the tale unravels, the tension generated by Qasem's fate intensifies. By using every device at their disposal, the actors play upon the already taut emotions of the spectators, moving them to the depths of their souls as with elegance and beauty this Ta'ziyeh is brought to a dramatic conclusion.

The pride and the pain of a defeated human being, alone and sincere, is expressed beautifully. The audience finds itself totally caught up in the action.

The climax of the tragedy and its most moving section occurs when Qasem lies in his death-throes. His face is covered with blood and Hussein rushes to his aid in these last moments of life and cradles him in his arms. He begs Hussein not to carry him to Fatemeh in this pitiable state, defeated and broken, with bloody face and wounded body. This last request best summarizes his thoughts—of love, of defeat, of hope, and of the sorrow of death.

EXTENSIVE USE OF PERSIAN TRADITION

One of the most interesting aspects of this tragedy is the extensive use of Persian traditions. They underlie the action and the dialogue from one scene to the next. The extensive utilization of Persian folklore and customs in many instances dominate the action, adding a delicate yet penetrating tranquility. Selecting the name Eagle for Ali Albar's horse, rubbing henna into the hands, feet, and face of the bride and groom, decorating the nuptial chamber, carrying the bride to the nuptial chamber on horseback, the tribal elders dressing the bridegroom in a robe of honor, preparing a tray of sweets, henna, a cloth for applying it, rose water, giving sweets (a cone of sugar) to everyone including the enemy in order that all might join in the celebration, wearing black in mourning and scattering straw over the head upon the death of loved ones all have roots in ancient Persian tradition. Dressing in brightly colored clothes after the completion of mourning, the manner in which goodbyes are said, and many other details are examples of pure Persian customs. These customs help to bind the Ta'ziyeh deeply into the lives, the consciousness, and the emotions of the people. They create an emotional bond between the people and their clergy. The spectators themselves become participants in the joys and sorrows of the play. In addition, religious traditions such as asking one's loved ones for their forgiveness

before taking leave, and the making of a final will and testament are expertly presented.

Another effective device which further captures the audience is the use of the title *Shahzadeh* or prince for the sons of Hassan and Hussein. This title was used exclusively for sons of Persian shahs and never for those of the caliphs. By employing this word, the narrators of the Ta'ziyeh and the clergy created a link between the heroes of Kerbela and the people of Persia. Based on an appreciation of the needs and wishes of the Persian public and an understanding of the popular mentality, the sons of Imam Hassan and Imam Hussein are called Prince Qasem, Prince Akbar, Prince Abd Allah, Prince Asgar even though only one of Hussein's wives was the daughter of Yazdegard, the last ruler of the Sasanian dynasty.

The elegant imagery used extensively in this Ta'ziyeh is rooted in religious exegesis and may be found in other Ta'ziyehs. "Candle of Kerbela," "a leaf in the embrace of the Chosen," "flower of the garden of Muhammad," "Candlelight in the sanctuary of Islam," and beautiful lines such as "moonlike face reddened with blood" and "place him in honor's lap" are but a few examples. Poetic images like "cypress trees aside the brook," "the ebony sphere," "tangled locks," and "gorgeous eyes" are also frequently used.

THE HEROISM AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF THE WOMEN

Another masterful aspect of this Ta'ziyeh is the astonishing portrayal of heroism and self-sacrifice by the women. The female characters put their own needs aside and forget their natural inclinations as mothers, sisters, wives, and blood relations in order to carry out the will of God, promote Islam, and support Hussein who stands out as a symbol of righteousness. The women sublimate their personal desires both great and small because they recognize that an honorable death for their husbands, sons, and brothers is far more to be desired than is weakness and disgrace. With unparalleled passion, Qasem's mother begs Hussein to allow her son to participate in the *Jihad*. Fatemeh, while sobbing over the death of her brother, obeys her father's order. Fatemeh courageously sends her husband to war and Zainab, who should be considered the best example of a true Islamic upbringing, puts aside her personal feelings completely. When Qasem leaves for the battlefield, his mother says:

O brave lion cub so worthy of my milk
I'm one thousand times fortunate to have a son of such ilk

And she shouts after him:

Go my darling with God you consort
The prayers of the mourners your sustenance and support.⁵

Qasem's farewell to his mother is extremely moving. He raises the question of his wife's fate:

When I from the saddle fall
And Hussein my corpse sorrowfully haul
In grief my body she'll study
Her hands in my gore she'll bloody
Let her not mourn and languish
Nor dishevel her hair in anguish⁶
My bride, my sunshine, with fate so unjust,
To thee O mother I lovingly entrust
And both of you I deposit in the hands of the Lord
Forgive me my sins when I die by the sword.⁷

She does not feign ignorance of the future when she bids her son farewell. Exemplary feminine characteristics shine against a background of tragedy. The loyal and loving women demonstrate again and again how the sacrifice of personal desires can help attain the higher goals of Hussein.

EMOTIVE FORCES

Another significant point to note is the manner in which the spirit of war and death casts its shadow over the entire play in a nerve-racking and fear-inspiring manner—a spirit which is constantly present throughout the various scenes of rebellion, joyfulness, decision-making and leave-taking. As the tale moves toward its conclusion, the hero's inexorable fate and the forces of oppression and tyranny rush onward like a flood, smashing, collapsing, destroying, and carrying everything with them. During these frightening moments which seem to last for an eternity, the hearts and souls of the characters are torn by conflicting thoughts and emotions, images which sometimes flash in moments of lightness, sometimes in darkness, sometimes against a flood of rain or in the midst of a wind storm. Sometimes decisions are inevitable from the beginning: sometimes they are made under duress and are contrary to personal desires and wise policy.

The loss of meter in the verse foretells the frightful shadow of death and oblivion which is about to fall. All of mankind's weaknesses are portrayed as undeniable facts of nature, and human needs over a lifetime are discussed and highlighted.

In order to achieve a better sense of inspiration, union, separation and leave-taking—all of which manifest themselves in an atmosphere of fear and anxiety over a painful death and future oblivion—are mingled together and boiled in the same pot. The event which occurred in Kerbela was so dreadful that for Hussein's loyal followers who have accepted an unjust death, it has taken on the hue of eternity.

Does not Hussein's gift of sweets to Shemr and Umar Sa'd from

Qasem's and Fatemeh's wedding prove that he was fully aware of his and Qasem's fate, and that he so acknowledged its inevitability that he was even willing to give sweets to the enemy while standing on the battlefield in the very pit of the murder-place? He accepts the relentless unjust tyranny which will bring him and his followers an eternal victory and he anticipates this victory in a most beautiful manner.

One unique aspect of this Ta'ziyeh is the presence of a beautiful new bride who separates from her husband at the very moment of conjugal union. After experiencing honor and happiness, she must face the blackness of death and suffering. Another unique aspect is the close similarity between Akbar and Qasem which keeps Akbar's memory alive in the minds of his friends. Qasem's bloody death is another unique aspect. Together they make this Ta'ziyeh different from all others. The traditions of success and failure, union and separation, marriage and death, hope and hopelessness are closely intermingled, giving a special greatness to this Ta'ziyeh. Many of the events portrayed have become symbols for the self-flagellation by believers throughout Iran on the Ashura Mourning Day. Qasem's nuptial chamber and Hussein's horse, draped in black, which carries Qasem into battle are two good examples.

In this Ta'ziyeh, as in all others, the villains admit to the legitimacy and the greatness of Imam Hussein's cause.

Accept my challenge, O gem among men
Accept my challenge, O ruler without a friend
Accept my challenge, ye from whose locks and face
One may learn the Surahs of lightness and grace.⁸

Does not Shemr, with these lines, admit to Hussein's legitimacy? And does not Umar Sa'd pay homage to the greatness of Qasem and Ali when he says, "Accept my challenge, O successor to the Lion of God"?⁹ Umar Sa'd and Shemr eliminate the distance between themselves and the audience in admitting the fact of Hussein's legitimacy. This action draws the audience deeper into the adventure. The dialogue speaks for reality. The truth must be spoken even if a man is dressed in the clothes of the enemy. And, more important, since the spectators are lost in a world of fantasy, they never imagine that the villains are devoid of religion. Even the enemy claim that they love Hussein and recognize him as one of their own, and shed tears over his fate and that of his followers. When the truth comes from the mouth of the enemy, it has even greater force and validity. One might imagine that the Ta'ziyeh performers while writing and acting out the play wished to acquit the villains of any evil intentions and not allow even a speck of atheistic or blasphemous dust to be seen on their religious visages.

The audience can never anticipate what scene will follow another. Events occur with such speed that the audience can only wonder what will

happen next. The events enacted in this Ta'ziyeh can never be fully foreseen, even though fate is predestined, and we must accept the fact that the heroes are prepared to sacrifice their lives. Although they frequently use sarcastic and insulting phrases, the expressions they use have religious overtones and are in fact far removed from their surface mundaneness, requiring a closer examination of the sarcasm, ridicule and insults. Hussein and his followers utter them only because they are in the right and Qasem and the others indulge in no other damning of the enemy. And they never go beyond what the enemy themselves say, uttering only those words which they believe in and have faith in. Examples are "deceitful nation," "cursed," "tyrant," and "shameless."

While the events and scenes which dominate the adventure have imaginary elements and some of the acting and speech has a caricature-like aspect, such as when Hussein laments the death of Akbar by saying that he will kiss the saddle and stirrups of his horse—a section in which the love of a father for a son is honestly portrayed—it should be realized that the Ta'ziyeh narrators, the writers and the players, were not professionals. Rather, they were ordinary people expressing their own faith and devotion within the context of a religious happening. This fact affects all other elements in the play, such as the recitation of verse within the format of various Iranian metrical schemes and the use of drums, musical instruments, and a horse and other symbols to create a greater emotional response from the audience. A passion play has no other purpose than to strengthen the faith of the people by condensing and intensifying religious events in such a manner that the heart-rending juices of the play are extracted and trickled drop by drop onto the palates of the expectant spectators.

NOTES

1. The Ta'ziyeh analyzed in this essay is the *Ta'ziyeh of Qasim* from *Ta'ziyeh va Ta'ziyeh Khvānī* by Sādiq Humāyūnī (Shiraz: Festival of Arts Series, 1975).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
9. *Ibid.*