

# MUSLIM RITUAL OF SELF- PUNISHMENT, LONG SUPPRESSED, IS SHATTERED BY A MORTAR ATTACK

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

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*Note from Pastor Kevin: When reading the following article, it becomes obvious that fundamentalist Muslims follow the god of suffering, hate and death. Satan hates man and leads them into every form of self-mutilation like piercings, cuttings, physical destruction through drugs and suicide. These practices are as old as the man and are condemned by the God of Love, in His holy Word:*

**K***Deut 14:1 "You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. 2 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (NKJ)*

*IKing 18:27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. (NKJ)*

ARBALA, Iraq, March 3 — On Tuesday morning, Hassam Jabbar stood outside a mosque, shivering in the predawn crispness, eyeing a three-foot-long sword.

"Today is the day," said Mr. Jabbar, a 25-year-old electrician.

With that, he sliced the sword across his shaved head and soon was bleeding profusely.

Just hours before a mortar attack killed at least 85 people in the holy city of Karbala, thousands of men were splattering the streets with their blood in a Shiite ritual honoring the seventh-century martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

It was the first such holy day, known as Ashura, in more than 25 years in which Shiites were allowed publicly to mutilate themselves. Security agents said the record-setting crowds, estimated to be more than one million people, were one reason the city, southwest of Baghdad, was made a target.

Sunni Muslims also observe Ashura, but the day has special significance for Shiites, who are defined by their belief that Hussein should have inherited the leadership of Islam. On Ashura, Shiites re-enact Hussein's battlefield death. Suffering is a big part of it.

Before the explosions ripped into the masses of Shiite pilgrims, casting Karbala into confusion and panic and fury, the town was an eddy of chaos. Surging throngs of men jabbed bloody knives at the sky, ecstatic crowds screamed out support, women sobbed, ambulances shrieked, drums thumped and boys who had sliced themselves too deeply collapsed into the garbage-strewn streets. Dozens of people were taken away in ambulances, but ambulance drivers said none of the injuries were serious.

"Heider! Heider! Heider!" men yelled, calling out an alternate name of Ali, son-in-law of the prophet and the father of Hussein. The day demonstrated not only Shiite passion, but also Shiite power and unity. After centuries of persecution, Iraq's Shiites, who make up 60 percent of the population, can finally taste change. This year's Ashura started off not only as a reclamation of lost culture but also of lost glory.

"Look at us," said Allam Mohsen, a doctor. "We have taken our identity back. Nothing can stop us."

Dr. Mohsen explained that even secular Shiites celebrated Ashura, and he said the ritual cut across class lines. "Schooled or not, doctor or farmer, we're here to show our love for Hussein," Dr. Mohsen said. He meant the revered Imam Hussein, the Shiite icon; not the reviled former ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.

Imam Hussein was killed in battle in 680 A.D. Karbala is home to his gold-domed shrine.

Saddam Hussein, a Sunni, outlawed self-mutilation as part of his persecution of Shiites. Under his government, even chain whips used in the buildup to the cutting ceremonies were illegal.

"We hid them in our homes," said Jihad Abid, a 36-year-old medical technician. "Nobody ever thought we would be able to whip ourselves again."

The opportunity to do so drew Shiite pilgrims from across Iraq, many coming to Karbala on foot. Men marched through the dust, carrying satin flags honoring Hussein on long, crooked poles. Families camped out in the reeds along the Euphrates.

Two young men from Baghdad hiked two days and about 70 miles with little more than a bottle of water and an apple between them.

"We walk to Karbala because we obey the prophet, and prophet says if you work hard now, you will be rewarded in the next life," said Amir Jawad, 20, as he watched bus after bus pass him by.

Once the pilgrims arrived in the holy city, many slept on the streets. Volunteers served free meals of lamb and rice. Some pilgrims joined groups of performers, who marched through the town banging cymbals and singing to Imam Hussein.

This morning, before dawn, the men assembled in the mosques, sharpening daggers and wearing clean white sheets. Some had long swords. Others carried kitchen knives.

Women do not cut their heads. Instead, they work themselves into fits of wailing. That, too, was banned during Saddam Hussein's government.

As darkness began to drain from Karbala's streets, the groups set off toward the shrine. Mr. Jabbar, the electrician, said his father had regaled him with brave tales of self-mutilation from years past.

"He told me that if I don't cut myself, I might as well not come home," Mr. Jabbar said.

Mr. Jabbar shook his head quickly when asked if he were at all anxious about slicing himself. Several other young men had the same reaction.

But an hour later, after his face was mapped with dried red rivulets and several of his friends had dropped into the street from loss of blood, Mr. Jabbar said weakly, "I do this for Hussein. Do not ask me anymore."