

Burning Every Day Guidebook

Questions & Answers

1. Why does Imam Hussain sacrifice himself for Islam? What does that mean and what did that sacrifice entail? How does the sun explain it?

Imam Hussain's sacrifice consisted in him giving up everything for God. Hussain gave up all of his material things, his family, and his own life. What this means is Hussain saved Islam by representing the best of Islam, by representing kindness and justice among other virtuous qualities, in the face of the worst of cruelties and evil done by Yazid. It is a rejection of the deviation from Islam occurring at the hands of the official "Caliph" of Islam of the time, Yazid. The Umayyad caliphate unjustly usurped power and claimed to represent Islam when in reality truth, justice, and authority lay with Imam Hussain and the path of the Ahl al-Bayt, the family of the Prophet.

2. What explanation did the sun provide for Lady Zaynab's famous saying that "I saw nothing but beauty" on the day of Ashura? What is beauty? What made Ashura beautiful? What is light and dark, and what role do they play in the understanding of true beauty?

The sun explains that Lady Zaynab saw the light and goodness of Hussain clearly displayed in the face of the darkness and evil of Yazid's cruel and tyrannical rule. Hussain's mercy, compassion, courage, and self-sacrifice (among other virtuous qualities) are beautiful because those are the beautiful traits of God. Ashura's beauty shines through because it shows the best of humanity, Hussain, (the best reflection of the beauty of God's names) next to the worst, Yazid: the calamity of Ashura thus demonstrates the brightest light (Hussain) in the darkest night. The selfless sacrifice of Hussain saves Islam because it shows true beauty and shines light on the best path to reaching God: the path of Imam Hussain and the Ahl al-Bayt.

3. What is the nature of reality as the moon explains it? What does the moon say to the sun when he is describing the world as mirrors? What are signs? Why did God create everything as signs and mirrors?

The moon explains to the sun that all things are reflections. He notes that he himself reflects the sun's light (the moon itself does not have light to emit). The same is true for all other things, which are mirrors for God. Thus, mirrors that reflect God well become better signs. Signs of goodness are all proofs of God and point the way to Him. God creates signs and mirrors in order for us to know, love, and grow closer to Him. The best signs are humans because they reflect the Light of God and the Ahl al-Bayt in their hearts (if they purify their hearts correctly!). The role of Imam Hussain in this mirror philosophy is that he is the best mirror of God (as the best humans in existence are the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt). One should strive to be the mirror of Imam Hussain. For example, Abbas's bravery, altruism, and self-discipline are out of his love for Hussain. Abbas is the mirror of Hussain and, therefore, among the best mirrors of God. Therefore, the way to find the correct and elevated path to God is to strive to be the best mirror of Hussain, like Abbas, standing faithfully and truly by the Imam.

4. Why is it bad to be attached to the world? What happens when we do not see everything as a sign to God? What does it mean to confuse a means for the end? Why were there so few followers of the Imam even though there were so many Muslims, many of whom were Shi'a Muslims?

It is bad to be attached to the world because it is mistaking the means for the end—similar to being attached to a mirror rather than what is reflected in the mirror itself. Everything is a sign for us to purify ourselves in order to serve God and reach Him. If we become attached to something besides God, that thing is an idol in one's heart. Our goal in life should be to break all of the idols of our heart (like fame, wealth, prestige, pleasure, etc...) so that only God remains in the heart. This is exemplified in the doctrine of "There is no god but God" (la ilaha illa Allah): all false gods and bad idols should first be negated in order for the Oneness of God to be affirmed. People confuse means for ends when they look at signs and worship the signs, even though the point of a sign is that it leads back to God. They become results-oriented rather than duty-oriented for God. This is why so many Muslims did not (and do not) follow the Imam. They fell in love with the world, with riches or fame or status, and did not see that all that they valued wrongly overshadowed their love for the Imam, the ultimate reflection of God, and what is proper to do to serve him and reach God.

5. How is Burning Every Day a becoming story of the sun? What is “becoming,” according to Islamic thought? How does one become? How does the sun become?

The Islamic journey of becoming takes someone from ignorance to knowledge and from darkness to light. It is the story of all of us, represented here by the story of the sun. One's becoming, like a circle, starts with a descent and ends with an ascent. The sun experiences her descent after Ashura when she questions herself and seeks out the moon, a wise sage, to teach her. In order to truly become, humanity needs guides, and this is why we have the Imams. The sun ascends and flourishes when she learns the truth about Hussain's sacrifice and beauty and strives to live in that path. As she learns more about the Imam, the sun learns more about herself and her duty. By the end of the story, the sun is awakened and becomes knowledgeable and determined to love God through recognizing, loving, and serving the Imam. To become, one has to sell oneself to God and live in the path of the Imam, striving to know, love, and serve him (all of the Imams, and in our time especially Imam Zaman). The foundational process is through self-purification and destroying all the false idols and bad qualities one has and to serve him by helping others find and understand the meaning of this path and help overcome the challenges and obstacles that may stand in our way.

6. Why is it necessary for the sun to seek out the moon? How is she able to find the moon? What does she have to do and why? What is the role of the moon in the sun's becoming? Why does the moon say that the source of their light is the same? What is moonlight and why is that important from an Islamic understanding?

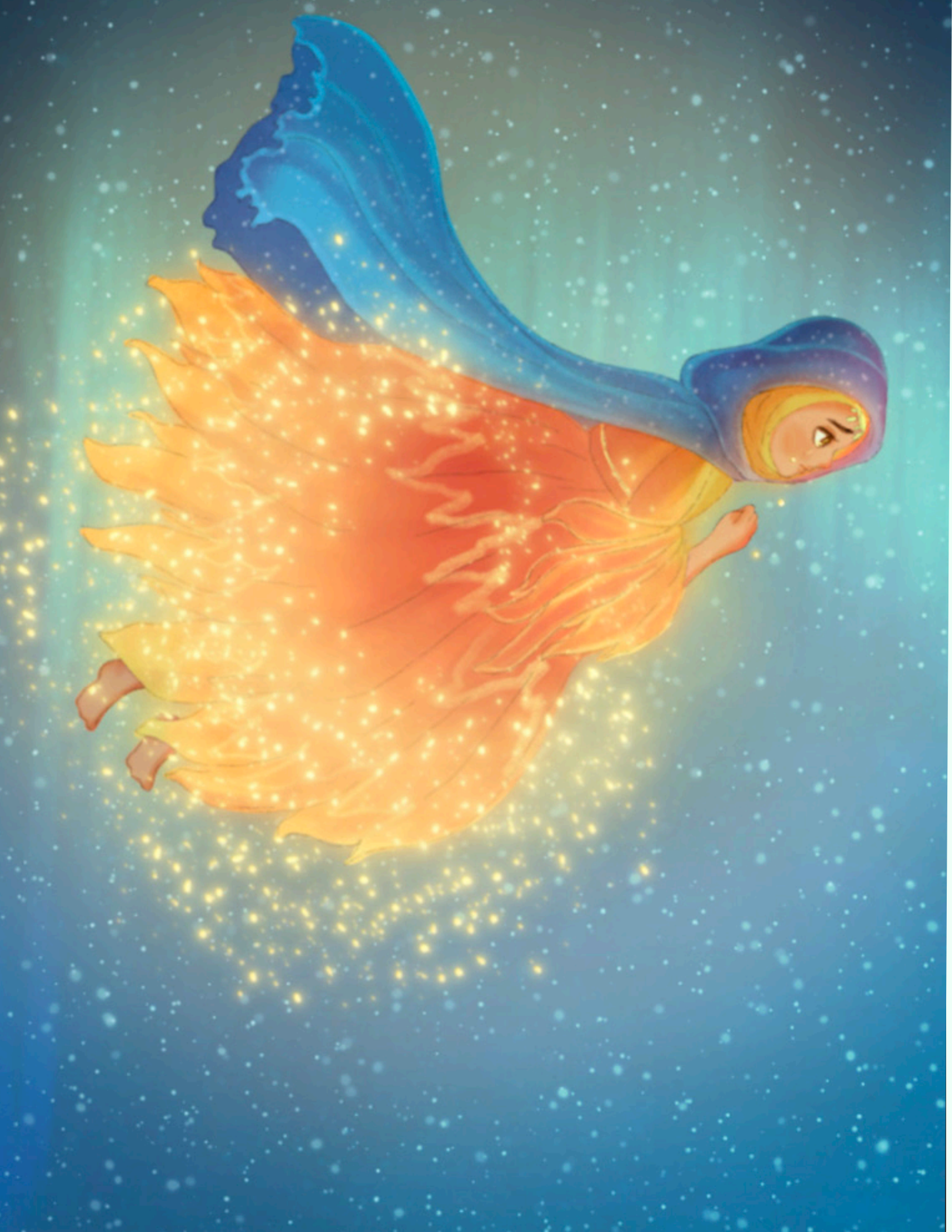
The sun needs the moon because the only way for someone to become their true self and to learn is to find someone who is more knowledgeable and more virtuous in the path of the Imam. The sun seeks out the moon because of the moon's good character and traits. In order to discover the moon, the sun needs to cover herself and her ego (symbolized by her self-veiling with the night). One needs to humble themselves and recognize that they do not know before they can learn or be taught. Only when that happens is the moon able to teach the sun. The moon also reminds the sun that his own light comes from a reflection of her light, which the sun had forgotten. This is important because that means they share the same light, so it is possible for the sun to become wise like the moon. Islam encourages us to emulate and be like those who are good because we, too, share light with one another. This light is the Light of Allah and that of the Ahl al-Bayt that exists in our heart. One can refer to the Light Verse in the Quran (24:35). Through cleaning and polishing the heart, the mirror can shine the Light of God. But if the mirror rusts and becomes unclean, it cannot reflect that light: the heart will turn to stone.

7. What does the sun learn from her talk with the river, Forat? How does love tie into one's becoming? Who should one love, and why? What is one effect of crying for Hussain that the sun learns from the river?

The sun learns from the river the importance of love's role in becoming. The river is able to become because of his love for Abbas. When the river saw Abbas, the river looked at Abbas' amazing qualities of loyalty and devotion. The river fell in love with Abbas because of those qualities. This is important because we start to become more like the things we love. If we love bad things, like the army of Yazid, then we have a bad becoming. But if we love good things, like the honored and noble qualities of Abbas and Imam Hussain, then we will become good too. The sun also realizes that the river becomes more pure because of his tears for Hussain. The river's tears cleanse his heart and allows him to more fully reflect the moon's light. Tears for Hussain work to purify us and our hearts. We should strive to be a mirror of Imam Hussain, the best mirror of God, as Abbas showed himself to be the best mirror of Hussain.

8. What does the sun learn from the land of Karbala? How old is Karbala? How have all the Prophets cried for Imam Hussain?

The land of Karbala teaches the sun about Hussain's importance at all times and all places. Karbala herself was elevated because of the blood of Hussain, the noblest of blood. Karbala announces that she is older than all the other lands because of the significance of Hussain's sacrifice. All the Prophets throughout time mourned for Imam Hussain before Ashura because Karbala already existed from the beginning of creation and Ashura was foretold. The Prophets all had knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt and loved them and sought intercession from them in order to reach God. Ashura was critical in this quest.



9. Why is it important that the sun began at noon and returned at noon? What is the symbolism of starting and ending in the same place even when so much within her has changed? Why does the sun go around in a circle? Why do the planets go around in a circle? What is the symbolism of a circle?

The Islamic journey of becoming starts and ends with the same place because we all come from the same place and must return there: our origin and return is to God. A perfect line drawn from a starting point is a return back to the same point creates a perfect circle, an important symbol in Islamic philosophy and art. From the point of origin, there are two cycles or arcs: the descent and the ascent. The descent represents creation and revelation and the ascent refers to the intellect ('aql) and the Imam in leading people back to God. Reflecting this philosophy, the becoming story of the sun moves in a full circle away from and ultimately returning at noon.

10. What is the linkage between the burning of the sun and giving of light? What does it mean for something to burn? Think back to our earlier question of what is light and what is beauty. How, then, does the sun manage to give light, to become beautiful?

For something to burn, it must burn itself. Think of a match (or a candle, as is commonly used as a symbol in Islamic philosophy and poetry). When a match is lit on fire, fire envelopes and feeds off the match, creating light. The same is true for the sun. The sun chooses to sacrifice her "self" in the same way she did when she covered herself up with the night in order to see the moon. The sun manages to give off light and become beautiful by casting her "self" aside. She does so burning out of the pain of love for Imam Hussain, which in reality is burning out of love for God. Burning and purification through love is what makes one know, reach, and follow Light back to God. The symbol of the sun also alludes to its divine sign in the mirror philosophy as a sign of the Imam, of light, and of orientation towards the East (where the sun rises) in the pursuit of divine knowledge and God. The sun sheds light upon all. Also, the concept of occultation (or ghayba) of the Hidden Imam is compared to the sun being blocked by clouds. The sun still exists and its light is emitted, which sustains life on earth, even though one may not be able to commonly see the sun since it is covered by clouds.

11. What is the debate between the spears? Identify what each side is claiming about their role in Karbala. Which side does the sun say is correct, or does the sun disagree with both? Explain why.

One group of spears blame themselves for their role in the tragedy and repent. Historically, a group of Shi'a who did not join the Imam shortly repented after Hussain's martyrdom and vowed to make up for their sin; they were called the Tawwabun. Another group blamed the humans, calling them wicked. They believe it is ultimately the evil nature of mankind that created Ashura and that there was no way to overcome this as people will always be evil. A third group claimed God made it so and Ashura was destined to happen, it wasn't their own fault and was a predetermined calamity. The claims of the third group reflect the debate between destination and free will or choice that is a prominent debate within Islamic philosophy. The sun agrees with the first group of spears that they should all repent. She goes on to say that the spears are responsible, even if Ashura was based on God's will, because everyone is responsible for their own actions. Our actions are something we control--it is a choice, and God determines the result. We must act based on our duty and what is right to do. The sun also reminds the spears that it is not all humans who are wicked. There are good people who truly embody humanity, like Hussain, and bad people who do not represent humanity in its true form, like Yazid and his army.

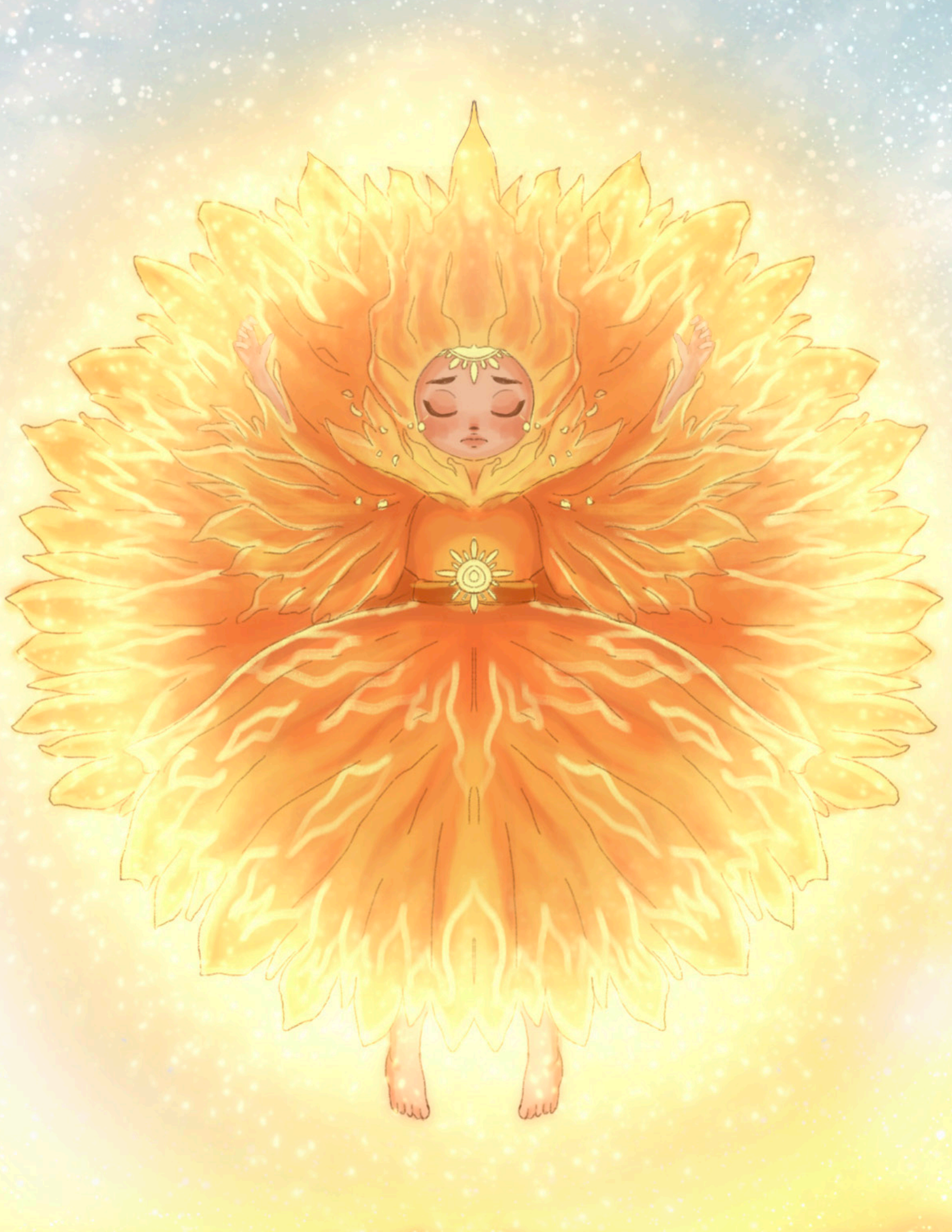
12. What did the tents get wrong about their service to the Imam? What does the Sun say to them at the end of the story and why? What does it mean to be a servant to the Imam?

The tents believed they were the ones who were helping Imam Hussain, an idea which could arise out of ignorance and arrogance. However, the sun reminds them that it was because of the Imam's kindness, mercy, and help that they could even have the great opportunity and privilege of being with the Imam and helping in his cause. A true servant to the Imam recognizes the Imam's high status and lofty character and his/her inability to reach or grasp such magnificence and beauty. We are not helping the Imam; the Imam is helping us. We can only aspire to truly love and serve him, wishes that can only come true through his recognition of us and granting this opportunity to us if we show our sincerity in truly living in his path, pursuing self-sacrifice, and polishing our heart of all pollutants and idols. We should greatly yearn for meeting the current Imam, Imam Zaman, and speak with him, and commit to living in his path and destroying all of our selfishness and bad traits.



Themes & Symbols

- Moon as a guide
- Sun can only see the moon when her ego is covered
- Becoming story of the sun
- Full circle from noon to noon (descent and ascent)
- Two worlds (night and day)
- Invisible and visible
- Ontology of mirrors and creation
- Cleansing the heart/Purification
- Crying for Hussain purifies one's heart
- Pollutants of the heart (fame, power, lust, wealth, friends, false love)
- Debate between spears about predestination and free will
- Misunderstanding of tents who thought they were sheltering Hussain
- Theme of light, source of light shared between the moon and sun
- Sun understands she's burning to give light for Hussain, becomes light, and serving as a sign for God
- Land of Karbala; Prophets all knew it; precreation
- The river telling a love story about Abbas (not willing to drink or be selfish, river unable to help because of Abbas' love for Imam Hussain and God)
- Allusion to the Repenters with the spears (Tawwabun)
- Beauty of Ashura and brightest light in the darkest night
- Sacrifice of Hussain for Islam and the reasons for his sacrifice



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