

## The Journey to Hijaz

I arrived in Jeddah and met my friend al-Basheer, who was very pleased to see me and took me to his home and showed me the highest degree of generosity. We spent the time by going around in his car visiting places, and did the Umrah together, and we spent a few days together full of worshipping and other pious works. I apologized to my friend for being late due to my long stay in Iraq and told him about my new discovery, or rather new faith.

He was open minded and well informed, so he said to me, "This is true, for I hear that they have some great learned scholars, but also they have many deviant groups that cause us considerable trouble during the pilgrimage. I asked him, "What are these problems they cause?" He said, "They pray around the graves and enter al-Baqee in groups crying and wailing and they carry with them pieces of stones on which they prostrate themselves; and if they visit the grave of our master al-Hamzah in Uhud, they make up a funeral ceremony, beating their chests and wailing as if al-Hamza had just died. Because of all that, the Saudi government prevented them from visiting the graves."

I laughed and said, "Is it because of that you judge them as being deviant from Islam?" He said, "That and other reasons. They come to visit the Prophets (saw) grave, but at the same time they stand around the graves of Abu Bakr and Umar and curse them, and some of them throw dirt and litter on the graves."

When I heard these allegations I remembered what my father had told me when he came back from the Pilgrimage that they throw dirt on the Prophet's (saw) grave. There is no doubt that my father never saw them with his own eyes because he said, "We noticed some soldiers from the Saudi Army beating a few pilgrims with sticks and when we protested against their humiliating treatment of the pilgrims of the House of Allah, they answered us: These are not Muslims, they are Shi'a who brought dirt to throw on the Prophet's (saw) grave. My father said: We then left them at that, and cursed them and spat at them."

And now I heard from my Saudi friend who was born in al-Medinah al-Munawwarah that they came to visit the Prophet's (saw) grave but throw dirt on Abu Bakr's and Umar's graves. I became suspicious of the two stories, for I had been on pilgrimage and had seen the blessed room where the graves of Prophet (saw) and Abu Bakr and Umar are locked and nobody could come near them to touch the door or window or indeed to throw anything inside them for two reasons.

Firstly there are no gaps, and secondly there is a strict guard with tough soldiers watching each door, and every one of them carries a whip in his hand to beat the pilgrims who dare to enter the room. It is very likely that some of the Saudi soldiers in their prejudice against the Shi'a accused them with these allegations to justify their aggression towards them or perhaps to provoke other Muslims to fight them and to spread rumors in their countries, that the Shi'a hate the Messenger of Allah and throw dirt on his grave, thus killing two birds with one stone.

A distinguished man whom I trusted told me the following story: We were going around the House of Allah when suddenly a young man suffered a severe pain in his stomach and vomited. The soldiers who were guarding the Black Stone started beating the man and accused him of defiling al-Kaba. He was taken out in a deplorable way then was tried and executed the same day.

All these dramatic stories went round in my mind and I thought for a second about the justification of my Saudi friend for blaspheming the Shi'a, but could not find anything apart from the fact that they beat their chests and cry and prostrate themselves on stones, besides the fact that they pray by the graves. I asked myself, "Is this sufficient proof to blaspheme he who believes that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (saw) is His Servant and His Messenger? And he prays, gives alms, fasts Ramadan, visits the House of Allah on pilgrimage, does good deeds and prevents bad deeds.

I did not want to antagonize my friend and to enter into a useless discussion with him so I briefly said, "May Allah enlighten us and enlighten them, and lead us on the right path, and may Allah curse the enemies of Islam and the Muslims."

Every time I went around the House of Allah during al-Umrah, and during my visit to the Blessed Mecca where I found only a few visitors, I prayed and asked Allah genuinely to open my eyes and to lead me to the truth. I stood by the place of Ibrahim (a.s.) and recited the following verse from the Qur'an:

***“And strive hard in (the way of) Allah (such) a striving as is due to Him: He has chosen you and has not laid upon any hardship in religion; the faith of your father Ibrahim; he named you Muslims before and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people; therefore keep up prayer and pay the alms and hold fast by Allah, He is your Guardian, how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper.” (Holy Qur'an 22:78)***

Then I started calling our master Ibrahim or rather our forefather Ibrahim, as the Qur'an calls him: "O Father, you, who called us Muslims. your off spring have disagreed after you, some of them became Jews, others Christians and some others became Muslims; and the Jews were divided among themselves into seventy one groups the Christians were divided into seventy two groups and the Muslims were divided into seventy-three groups; all of them are in darkness, as you told your son Muhammad (saw) but only one group stayed faithful to your oath. O Father!

Is it the way that Allah wants it to be for His creation, as the fatalists believe, so Allah assigns to each

soul its destiny, to be Jewish or Christian or Muslim or atheist or polytheist; or is it for the love of this world and deviation from Allah's commands, that they forget Allah, so that He makes them forget themselves.”

I could not make myself believe in fatalism, and that Allah assigns a destiny to each individual, rather I tend to believe that Allah has created us and inspired us to understand what is right and what is wrong, and sent us His messengers to explain the complicated matters and to show us what is right or wrong. But man fell under the spell of this life's temptation and with all his arrogance, selfishness, ignorance, curiosity, stubbornness, injustice and tyranny deviated from the right path and followed the devil.

He distanced himself from the Merciful, so he lost his way, and the Holy Qur'an expressed that in the best way in the words of Allah:

***“Surely Allah does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves.” (Holy Qur'an 10:44)***

O our father Ibrahim! We cannot blame the Jews nor the Christians for not following the right path after they have been shown the way. Look at this nation which Allah rescued when He sent your son Muhammad (saw) to it, who took it out of the darkness and enlightened it and made it the best nation in the world. It too has been divided into too many warring groups, despite the fact that the Messenger of Allah (saw) has warned them and pressed them until he said, "It is forbidden for a Muslim not to speak to his brother Muslim more than three times."

Whatever happened to this nation which is divided into many small and warring states, some of which do not even know one another. O our father Ibrahim, whatever happened to this nation. It used to be the best nation in the world; it ruled from the East to the West and introduced knowledge and enlightenment to other nations.

Today it has reached a low ebb in its history; its land has been violated and its people have been expelled... Its al- Aqsa Mosque is occupied by a Zionist gang and no one is able to liberate it. If one visits their countries, one will find nothing except wretched poverty, terminal hunger, barren lands, diseases, bad manners, intellectual and technical backwardness, tyranny, persecution, and dirt. It is enough to compare the toilets in Western Europe to that in our countries, and see how much difference there is in hygiene between the two.

It is ironic to find this low level of hygiene in our countries despite the fact that Islam has taught us that "cleanliness is a sign of faith, and dirt is a sign of the devil". Has the faith moved to Europe and the devil come to live in our midst? Why Muslims are frightened to declare their faith even in their own countries!

Why the Muslim cannot even be the master of his own face, since he cannot grow his own beard! The Muslims cannot dress in Islamic costumes, whereas the sinful publicly drink alcohol and commit awful wrongs, and the Muslim cannot even correct them and show them the right way. In fact I have been

informed that in some Islamic countries like Egypt or Morocco there are fathers who send their daughters to sell their bodies, out of need and poverty, may there be no power or might but that of Allah the High and the Mighty.

O God why have you abandoned this nation and left it in darkness? No, my God, please forgive me, for it is this nation that abandoned You and chose the devil's path, and you, with all Your wisdom and might said, and Your saying is the truth:

***“And whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of the Merciful God, We appoint for him a devil, so he becomes his associate.” (Holy Qur’an 43:36)***

There is no doubt that the deterioration of the Islamic nation to this low state of submissiveness and backwardness is a sign of its deviation from the right path, and a small minority or one group among seventy three would not affect the destiny of a whole nation.

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said: “You are commanded to do good deeds and to prevent any objectionable act; otherwise Allah will put your wicked ones in charge of you, then your good people would call, but no one will listen to them.”

O God, we believe in what you have sent us and we follow the Messenger, so will you consider us with the believers? O God, please do not change our hearts after you have enlightened us. Please God, have mercy on us, for you are the Giver. O God, we have unjustly treated ourselves, and if you do not forgive us and have mercy on us, then we will certainly be among the losers.

I left for al-Medinah al-Munawwarah with a letter from my friend al-Basheer for one of his relatives there, so that I could reside with him during my stay in al-Medinah.

He had already spoken to him on the phone, and when I arrived he received me warmly and put me up in his house. As soon as I arrived, I went to visit the grave of the Messenger of Allah (saw), so I cleaned myself and put on my best clothes.

There were only a few visitors in comparison to those who come during the season of Pilgrimage, therefore I managed to stand before the graves of the Messenger of Allah (saw), Abu Bakr and Umar, something which I could not do during the Pilgrimage because of the crowds. As I tried to touch the doors for blessing, one of the guards rebuked me, and when I stayed for a long time to do my supplication and salutation, the guards ordered me to leave. I tried to speak to one of the guards, but it was in vain.

I went back to the blessed court and sat down to read the Qur'an and to improve my recitation of it. I repeated the recitation several times because I felt as if the Messenger of Allah (saw) was listening to me. I said to myself: Is it conceivable that the Messenger (saw) is dead like any other dead person? If so, why do we say in our prayers "May peace be with you O great prophet, and may Allah's mercy and

blessings be upon you" in a form which sounds as if we were addressing him. The Muslims believe that our master al-Khidr (sa) is not dead, and that he would return the greetings of anybody who greets him.

Also, the followers of the Sufi orders believe that their Shaykhs, Ahmed al-Tijani or Abdul Qadir al-Jilani come to see them openly and not in their sleep, so why are we reluctant to grant this noble deed to the Messenger of Allah, and he is the best of all mankind? But the reassuring thing is that the Muslims are not reluctant towards the Messenger of Allah except the Wahabis, from whom, for this and various other reasons, I started to feel estranged. I found their manners very coarse, because they treat other Muslims who disagree with their beliefs very harshly. I visited al-Baqee Cemetery once, and while I was calling for mercy upon the souls of Ahl al-Bayt, I noticed an old man standing near me crying, and because of that I realized he was a Shi'i.

He positioned himself towards the Kaba and started to pray, and suddenly a soldier rushed towards him, as if he had been monitoring his moves, and kicked him while he was in a position of prostration. The man fell on his back unconscious, and then the soldier started beating him and cursing him. I felt so sorry for the old man and thought he might have been killed and so I shouted at the soldier, "You must not do that! Why did you beat him while he was praying?" He rebuked me and said, "You be quiet and do not interfere, or else I will do to you what I have just done to him!"

I realized that the soldier was full of aggression, so I avoided him, but I felt angry at myself for not being able to help those who are unjustly treated, and felt angry at the Saudis who treat the people as they like without any check or accountability for their actions. There were some visitors who witnessed the attack, but all that they could do was to say, "There is no power or might but in Allah." Others said, "He deserves what he got because he was praying by the graves."

I could not control myself, so I said to that particular person, "Who told you that we must not pray by the graves? He answered, ' The Messenger of Allah (saw) prevented us from doing so.' I replied angrily. You are lying about the Messenger of Allah." I became aware of the dangerous situation and feared that some of the visitors might call the soldier to attack me, so I said gently, if the Messenger of Allah prevented us from praying by the graves, why should millions of pilgrims and visitors disobey him and commit a sin by praying by the graves of the Prophet (saw), Abu Bakr and Umar in the Holy Mosque of the Prophet and in many other mosques around the Islamic world.

Even if praying by the graves is a sin, should it be prevented with such harshness? Or should we prevent it by gentle action. Allow me to tell you the story of the man who urinated in the mosque of the Messenger of Allah and in his presence, and some of his Companions drew their swords to kill him, but he stopped them and said: Let him go and do not harm him, and pour some water on the place where he urinated. We are sent to make things easy and not difficult. We are sent to spread the good words and not to make people keep away from us.

The Companions obeyed his orders, and the Messenger of Allah (saw) asked that man to come and sit

next to him and spoke to him nicely. He explained to him that the place was the House of Allah and should not be dirtied, and the man seemed to have understood the point, for he later was seen in the mosque wearing his best and cleanest clothes. Allah – the Great – was right when He said to His Messenger (saw):

***“If you had been rough and hard-hearted with them, they would certainly have dispersed from around you.” (Holy Qur’an 3: 159)***

Some of the visitors were moved when they heard the story, and one of them took me aside and asked me, "Where do you come from?" I said, "From Tunisia." He then greeted me and said, "O brother, by Allah, take care of yourself and do not say such things here at all, and this is my advice to you, for the sake of Allah."

I became so angry and bitter about those who claim that they are the guardians of al-Haramayn and treat the guests of the Merciful with such harshness, so that no one is allowed to voice an opinion or to believe in a belief that does not suit their way of thinking, or indeed, to recite a saying (of the Prophet) that does not coincide with their own recitation of the sayings.

I went back to the house of my new friend, whose name I did not then know, and he brought me some supper and sat in front of me and asked me where I had been. I told him my story from the beginning to the end and said, "My brother, I have started to be dissatisfied with the Wahabis and have begun to lean towards the Shi'a."

Suddenly the expression on his face changed and he said to me, "I warn you not to say anything like that again!" Then he left me without even finishing his supper, although I waited for him, until I went to sleep. I woke up next morning with the call for prayers from the Mosque of the Prophet (saw), and found the food was untouched, which meant that my host had never come back.

I became suspicious and feared that the man might have been a member of the secret service, so I left the house quickly and went to the Prophet's Mosque praying and worshipping. After the afternoon prayers I noticed a speaker giving a lesson to some worshippers, so I went towards him, and later learnt from one of the listeners that he was the Qadi (magistrate) of al-Medinah. I listened to him as he was explaining some Qur'anic verses, and after he had finished his lesson and was about to leave, I stopped him and asked him, "Please Sir, could you give me some indications as regard the interpretation of the following Qur'anic verse:

***‘And Allah only desires to keep away the un-cleanness from you, O people of the House, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying.’ (Holy Qur’an 33:33)***

I asked, "Who is being referred to as Ahl al-Bayt in this Qur'anic verse?" He answered me immediately, "The wives of the Prophet (saw), and the verse started by mentioning them:

***'O wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women, if you fear God.'* (Holy Qur'an 22:32)**

I said to him, "The Shi'a Ulama say that it is 'Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, but of course I disagree with them because the beginning of the verse states: O wives of the Prophet. But they answered me as follows. That if the verse meant them (i.e. the wives of the Prophet), then the grammatical form would have been feminine throughout. But the Highest says:

"You are not (like any other women) if you fear God, be not soft in your speech, speak, stay in your houses, do not display your finery, keep up your prayers, give the alms, obey Allah and His Messenger." (All the above verbs are in the feminine form.)

And then, in the section of the verse which refers to Ahl al-Bayt, the form changes, so He says: "To keep away the uncleanness ... and to purify you (in the masculine grammatical form)."

He removed his spectacles and looked at me then said, "Beware of these poisonous ideas, the Shias change the words of Allah in the way they like, and they have many verses about 'Ali and his off-spring that we do not know. In fact they have a special Qur'an. They call it The Qur'an of Fatimah. I warn you not to be deceived by them."

I replied, "Do not worry sir, I am on my guard, and I know many things about them, but I just wanted to find out." He asked, "Where are you from?" I said, "From Tunisia." He asked, "What is your name?" I replied, "Al-Tijani." He laughed with arrogance and said, "Do you know who Ahmed al-Tijani was?" I answered, "He was the Shaykh of a Sufi order."

He said, "He was an agent of the French Colonial authorities, and the French Colonial system established itself in Algeria and Tunisia with his help, and if you visit Paris go to the National Bibliothique and read for yourself in the French Dictionary under "A" and you will find France gave the Legion de Honour to Ahmed al-Tijani who gave them incalculable help."

I was surprised at what he said, but I thanked him and bade him farewell.

I stayed in al-Medinah for a whole week, and I prayed forty prayers and visited all the holy places. During my stay there I made very careful observations, and as a result I became more and more critical of the Wahabis.

I left al-Medinah al-Munawwarah and went to Jordan to see some friends I had met while on my way to the pilgrimage, as I indicated before. I stayed with them for three days, and found them full of hatred towards the Shi'a, more so than the people in Tunisia.

There were the same stories and the same rumors, and everyone I asked for proof, answered that "he had heard about them," but I found nobody who had had contact with the Shi'a or read a book by the Shi'a or even met a Shi'i in all his life.

From Jordan I went to Syria, and in Damascus I visited the Umayyad Mosque, next to which is the place where the head of our master al-Husayn is resting; also I visited the grave of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and our lady Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

From Beirut I took a ship that was going directly to Tripoli. The journey lasted for four days, during which I relaxed physically and mentally. I reviewed the whole trip in my mind and concluded that I had developed an inclination and respect towards the Shi'a; in the meantime I started to resent and keep away from the sinister Wahabis. I thanked Allah for what He had given me and for His care and asked Him, Praise be to Him the Highest, to lead me to the right path.

I arrived home eager to meet my family and friends and found them all well. I was surprised when I entered my house and found many books had arrived home before me but I knew where they had come from. When I opened these books, which filled the whole house, I felt grateful to those people who had not broken their promises. In fact the books they sent me by post exceeded the number of books that had been given to me as presents there.

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