

Introduction

This is the story of the victory of truth. It is the story of a unique woman whose own fate was inextricably bound with the historical events of Karbala that have impressed upon mankind the true reality of living Islam.

It was on the plains of Karbala that the conflict between Imam Husayn, 'alayhi 'salam, and the pretender to the caliphate, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, was waged in battle. Imam Husayn had steadfastly refused to pay homage to Yazid and acknowledge him as leader of the Muslim world. It was no secret that Yazid flagrantly flaunted the laws of Islam and even publicly derided its beliefs. His claim to the caliphate bore no legitimacy or acceptability in the eyes of Imam Husayn, 'alayhi 'salam.

It would be facile and dishonest to consider their confrontation as but an isolated instance of power-jockeying in the early days of Islam. The issue on which they clashed is one that continues to be a source of needless antagonism among Muslims today, and that is: What manner of man has the right to rule the Muslim world, or indeed, mankind? Could Muslims be ruled by one integrated, complementary set of laws rooted in the knowledge of Allah ta'ala's supreme tawhid (unity), or by a power that seeks to elevate temporal values to hard and fast law at the cost of allegiance to the Sole Source of all creation?

This story unfolds through the life of Zaynab Kubrah, grand-daughter of the Holy Prophet, salla'llahu 'alayhi wa alihi wa sallam, daughter of Hadrat Fatima and Imam Ali, 'alayhim as-salam. From what we know of her actions and speeches, it is clear that in her was reflected the divine prophetic light that was her heritage.

In writing on Zaynab bint Ali, 'alayha 's-salam, we must first bear in mind an unalterable fact: that is, despite the efforts of numerous biographers, very little actual recorded historical fact is available about her. Even the exact dates of her birth, death, marriage, or number of children, cannot be ascertained with complete confidence.

Oral tradition about Zaynab [a.s.] has gradually evolved to a point-of subjective elaboration and emotional hyperbola that have eventually clouded her real persona and the context from which we have come to know her.

Indeed, the romantic mythology that now shrouds both her and her brother Imam Husayn [a.s.] seems to distance us from wanting to understand what they really stood for and what their actions really meant, both in the context of their afflicted times and throughout all times, present and future.

It is not necessary however to dig up as many facts or versions of her life as are available in order to perceive her purity and the strategic importance of her contribution. Though the information may be little, it is enough. The fact that we remember her at all is sufficient to rekindle our understanding of the intimate ideals for which life is worth serving. This book seeks to let these facts speak for themselves. The conclusions to be drawn are implicit to any reader whose heart and mind are available and receptive to the essence of submission.

According to the shari'ah (revealed law) of Allah women are hidden treasures, neither to be displayed nor advertised. Theirs is a subtle, fundamental and discreet domain. Imam Ali, 'alayhi 's-salam, once asked Hadrat Fatima, 'alayha 's-salam, "Ma khayru 'n-nisa (who are the best among women)?"

She replied, "La yarina 'r-rijala wa la yarunahunna (those who do not see men nor are seen by them)."

This then is another reason why so little is known about Zaynab [a.s.] or any other women throughout the history of Islam. But this rule can only apply if all the other elements of a pure Muslim society are equal. If the application of the divinely directed formula is chaotic and imbalanced, then that is the time when a woman feels compelled to emerge into the open arena. This is the situation in which Zaynab [a.s.] found herself. After Karbala no one was left that had the courage to stand up to tyranny, speak the truth, and submit to the consequences.

Thus what we know of her is only because of exceptional circumstances. A twist in history created the conditions that forced Zaynab [a.s.] to declare, not herself, but the truth. It is through her extraordinary handling of the wretched trials she endured that we have caught glimpses of the untold depths of her courage, forbearance, patience and submission to the decree of Allah. It is partly through her that the prophetic legacy was rescued from being eclipsed by the ever-present shadows of kufr (denial of Truth), and it is in this light that we must forever remember her and take inspiration and guidance from her example.

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