

Eloquent Defiance – Kufa

The next day the members of the Prophet's family were made to leave for Kufa to be presented to Ibn Ziyad. Among the prisoners were Zaynab [a.s.], her sister Umm Kulthum [a.s.], other women of the Bani Hashim, Imam Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.], three young sons of Imam Hasan [a.s.] and other daughters of Imam Husayn. When, on their way, they reached the battlefield, a heart-rending sight met their eyes. The bodies of the martyrs lay naked on the burning sand, covered with dust and blood. The enemy had not buried them, although they had buried their own dead.

Seeing this scene of carnage, Imam Ali [a.s.] was so affected that he appeared to be on the verge of death himself. Noticing his state, Zaynab [a.s.] said to him, "O you who are a reminder of my grandfather and father. What has happened to you for I see that you are about to lose your life."

He replied "Dear Aunt, how can I be otherwise when I see that the bodies of my father, uncle, brothers and cousins are lying on the ground neglected while their clothes have been removed and there is no arrangement for shrouding and burying them." Zaynab [a.s.] then also openly lamented the murder of her beloved brother and their imprisonment.

Umar ibn Sa'd had entrusted the severed heads of Husayn [a.s.], his sons, and other martyrs, to different tribal chiefs so that on the way people would see that various tribes had taken part in the battle and none would dare to interrupt their march. The captives were made to ride on camels without saddles, their faces unveiled for all the world to see, while ahead of them their captors gleefully carried the chopped off heads of their loved ones impaled on spears.

Kufa was then regarded as the principal city of Islam. Ali [a.s.] had made it his capital during his caliphate and here Zaynab [a.s.] and Umm Kulthum had once lived respected and loved. Now they came to this city of their memories as captives.

It was night when they arrived at the city, and the palace of Ibn Ziyad was shut, so they were made to camp outside. When he was informed of their arrival the next day he ordered that a great function should take place to which all would be invited without distinction. The head of Imam Husayn [a.s.] was to be placed on a gold tray near the court chair, and the heads of the other martyrs were also to be displayed.

The people of Kufa were told that some tribe had committed aggression against the Muslims, but the Muslims had secured victory and because of this there was to be a celebration.

Festively dressed and in anticipation of joyful celebrations the people poured into the streets and market place and the music of victory was heard as the captives arrived. But there were a few who guessed the truth, and they looked on with downcast eyes. One woman, on recognising Zaynab [a.s.] and her retinue of unveiled women, ran into her house and brought them all head covers and sheets with which to cover their bodies. But they were not allowed to preserve their modesty and the enemy guards snatched them away.

When Zaynab [a.s.] saw some of the men and women who had realised what had really happened weeping and wailing she bade them be quiet and spoke to them with piercing eloquence and insight, "Praise be to Allah and blessings be on my grandfather Muhammad and his purified and chosen progeny."

"So now, O people who deceive, forsake and contrive, it is you who weep. May Allah not stop your tears and may your chests burn incessantly with the fire of grief and sorrow. Your example is that of a woman who assiduously prepares a strong rope and then untwines it herself, wasting her own hard labour."

"You swear such false oaths which bear no truthfulness at all. Beware that you have nothing except vain talk, false pride, mischief, malice, evil, rancour, falsehood, and sycophancy. Beware that your position is that of slave-maids and purchased girls who are but the meanest beings."

"Your hearts are full of enmity and rancour. You are like the vegetation that grows on filthy soil and is yet green, or like the mortar applied unto graves."

"You should know that you have perpetrated a very morbid deed and that have prepared evil provision for your next life, because of which Allah's anger is against you and His wrath would fall upon you."

"Now you are crying aloud and wailing over my brother! Yes, cry, because it behoves you to cry. Yes, weep profusely and laugh less, because you have earned the shame of killing the Imam of the age. The stain of his blood is now on your clothes and you cannot remove it, nor can you secure acquittal from the charge of killing the son of the last Prophet of Allah, the Chief of the youths in Paradise. You have killed a person who was your support, the knower of the Sunnah and the ultimate arbitrator at the time of your mutual disputations. He was the basis of your talks and actions. He was your place of refuge in the event of hardship."

"Know that you have been guilty of the most heinous crime in the world and have prepared the worst provision for the Day of Judgement. Curses be upon you and may destruction overtake you. Your efforts have gone wasted and you have been ruined. You have transacted a losing trade. You have become the victim of Allah's wrath and have fallen into ignominy and degradation."

"O people of Kufa, woe upon you. Do you realise which piece of Muhammad's heart you have severed, which pledge you have broken, whose blood you have shed and whose honour you have desecrated? You have certainly committed such a crime because of which the sky may fall down on the earth, the earth may crack and mountains crumble to pieces.

By killing your Imam you have committed a singularly evil act of rebellious behaviour and heedlessness towards dignity. In view of all these acts would you wonder if blood should rain down from the sky? In any case you should mind that the chastisement of the Next World will be severe. At that juncture there will be no one to help you. Do not regard the time and opportunity given you by Allah as small and unimportant, and do not be satisfied with it because if Allah is not quick in acting it does not imply that He is unable. For Him there is no fear that the time of vengeance is passing away. Allah is certainly keeping watch over you."

People wept, putting their fingers in their mouths and biting them. Without appealing to sentiments of pity, she exposed to them the reality of their selves and their evil deeds. The eyes that had previously been raised in expectation of celebration were now downcast with shame by the truthful force of her speech.

Zaynab [a.s.] entered the government palace with which she was so familiar. In the great audience hall her father had dispensed justice during his caliphate. Her sons had played there and her brothers had been accorded great respect by the people there. Although she was shabbily dressed, and her head was uncovered, she entered with awe-inspiring dignity and took her place in silence. Ibn Ziyad was amazed at her boldness and enquired who she was. Zaynab [a.s.] did not reply, and it was left to one of her slaves to inform him of her identity.

Enraged because of her apparently haughty behaviour, Ibn Ziyad addressed her, "Allah be praised! Your brother and your kinsmen are dead and their false claims have come to nought." Zaynab [a.s.] replied, "It was Allah's wish that they should be martyred, and they met their deaths bravely. If this was your heart's desire then you must indeed be content today. But you have killed those whom the Holy Prophet[s.a.w.] held upon his knee when they were children, and, whose play filled him with joy. Soon you will stand with them before Allah and they will demand justice. Beware the day of reckoning."

And it seemed to all that heard that she spoke with the voice of Ali [a.s.], her father. Angrily, Ibn Ziyad turned to a young man and enquired who he was. The youth replied, "I am Ali, son of Husayn." Ibn Ziyad was amazed that he was still alive, and ordered that he should be killed. But Zaynab [a.s.] intervened and said that if the boy was to be killed then she should be killed with him. Ibn Ziyad was moved by her love and allowed the young Imam to live.

Chains were then put around him, and a ring around his neck; then he was permitted to remain with the women.

The family of the Holy Prophet [s.a.w.] were then kept prisoner in a house near the central mosque.

There they were kept locked in and under guard, and none save slave–maids were able to visit them.

The day after their arrival Ibn Ziyad wrote to Yazid informing him about the killing of Husayn [a.s.] and the capture of his womenfolk. Yazid replied that the captives be sent to him in Damascus along with the heads of the martyrs. After about a month and seven days in Kufa they were made to set off for Damascus with a large escort of horsemen and footmen of the army so that none should intercept their journey.

With their steely–hearted escort the caravan left Kufa on the eighteenth day of Safar. The women suffered untold hardships on their journey to Damascus, which was no less than six hundred miles away. Their journey took them through many villages and towns, among them Karbala, Ba'albeck, Musal and Hums.

They were made to travel unveiled, on unsaddled camels like slaves, and the heads of the menfolk were carried on spears before them. In some of the towns crowds flocked to jeer at them, but if it happened that they were to pass through some place where the people were friendly towards the family of the Holy Prophet [s.a.w.], they came out to fight the Yazidites. They therefore were very often forced to take other routes involving long diversions, and the camels were made to run faster so as to cover the extra distance. The captives were harshly treated by their escort, and many of the children perished from the rigours of the journey.

After about twenty–eight days, on the sixteenth of Rabi' ul–Awwal, the caravan reached Damascus.

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