

Chapter 15: Arrival of Imam Husayn in Karbala

On Thursday, the 2nd of Muharram 61 A.H. Imam Husayn camped at a place in the region of Naynava called Karbala. On the following day Umar bin Sad bin Abi Waqqas Zohari reached there from Kufa with 4000 soldiers and encamped opposite the camp of Imam.

Sad belonged to the family of Bani Zohra bin Kilab of the tribe of Quraysh and was a near relative of Lady Amina, mother of the Holy Prophet. Umar's father Sad bin Abi Waqqas was one of the five persons who embraced Islam, in the beginning of the Holy Prophet's mission, owing to their acquaintance with Abu Bakr. He is well-known in the history of Islam and in connection with the Islamic conquests.

Umar bin Sad sent someone to the Imam enquiring of him as to why he had come to Iraq. The Imam said in reply: "The Iraqis themselves sent letters to me inviting me to come. Now if you do not like my coming I am prepared to return to the Hijaz".

Ibn Sad wrote a letter to Ibn Ziyad and informed him of what the Imam had said. Ibn Ziyad said: "Now that he has been caught in our clutches he hopes to escape and return to the Hijaz. There is now no question of showing indulgence and no way is open for him". Further he wrote to Ibn Sad: "I have carefully read your letter and understood what you have written. Tell Husayn bin Ali that he and all his companions should take oath of allegiance to Yazid. When this has been done we shall take some decision about them".

Soon after Ibn Sad received another letter from Ibn Ziyad asking him to prevent Husayn and his companions from utilizing water and not to allow them to drink even a drop of it. Umar immediately dispatched 4000 men under the command of Amr bin Hajjaj to stand between Imam Husayn and the river Euphrates and to check the use of water by the Imam and his companions. This event took place three days before the martyrdom of the Imam.

The Imam asked Ibn Sad to see him. They met at night at a place situated between the camps of the two armies and had protracted discussions. When Umar bin Sad returned to his camp he wrote a letter to Ibn Ziyad saying: "Allah has extinguished the flames of war. We have reached an agreement and the matter has been settled according to the national interests. Husayn bin Ali is now prepared to return to

the Hijaz or to proceed to some Islamic frontier". In order to make Ibn Ziyad agree to his suggestion he also added a lie justified by its motive.

Ibn Ziyad cooled down and was impressed by the suggestions made by Ibn Sad. However, Shimr bin Zil Jawshan, who was present there said: "You are making a mistake. You should make the most of this opportunity and now that you have gained control over Husayn bin Ali, you should not let him go, because you will not get such an opportunity again".

Ibn Ziyad said: "You are right. You should, therefore, go to Karbala personally and deliver this letter to Ibn Sad telling him that Husayn and his companions should surrender unconditionally, and then he (Ibn Sad) should send them to Kufa, and failing that he should fight with them. If Ibn Sad is not agreeable to this and is not prepared to fight with Husayn bin Ali, you yourself should assume the command of the army and cut off his (Ibn Sad's) head and send it to me".

Then he wrote a letter to Ibn Sa'd saying: "I have not sent you to behave leniently toward Husayn bin Ali and to intercede with me for him and to make his life secure. Now you should note that if he himself (i.e. Husayn) and his friends surrender, you should send them to me, and if they decline to do so, you should attack and kill them and mutilate¹ their bodies i.e. cut off their ears and noses, for they deserve this treatment. And if Husayn bin Ali is killed you should make the horses trample upon his chest and back because he is a cruel, quarrelsome and ungrateful man.

This does not mean that I wish to hurt him after his death. However, I have pledged my word that if I kill him I shall get him trampled upon by the horses. Now if you act according to my directions I shall reward you, but if you do not act as you have been advised, you should hand over charge of the army to Shimr bin Zil Jawshan, who has been given necessary instructions by me".

When Ibn Ziyad wrote this dangerous letter and gave it to Shimr, Ummul Banin's nephew (brother's son) Abdullah bin Abil Mihal bin Hizam was also present. He stood up and said: "O Emir! My cousins Abbas, Abdullah, Ja'far and Uthman, sons of Ali bin Abi Talib have come with their brother. If possible you may please write a letter of security for them¹". Ibn Ziyad replied: "All right".

What a great difference there is between the thinking and assessment of the two parties! The cousin of Abi Fazal renders, in his own opinion, a great service to his cousins (aunt's sons) and obtains a letter of security for them from Ibn Ziyad. But the question is: Will they make use of this letter and go away deserting their brother, master and Imam?

When the slave of Abdullah brought the said letter of security to Karbala and called the sons of Ummul Banin and said to them: "Your cousin Abdullah has sent a letter of security for you". He was perhaps thinking that on hearing this, the sons of Ummul Banin would become extremely happy. However, the sons of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib replied to him with one voice: "Convey our greetings to our cousin and tell him that we do not stand in need of security from Ibn Ziyad. Divine Security is better than the security granted by the son of Sumayya".

When Shimr reached Karbala he delivered Ibn Ziyad's letter to Umar Sad and they exchanged views. Eventually Umar Sad agreed to carry out the Emir's orders himself. Shimr was related to the mother of these young men (Abbas and his three brothers) and, therefore, announced that they had been granted security. However, he received the same reply.

Then Umar Sad mounted his horse, occupied a place in front of his army and said: "O riders of Allah! Mount, and be it known to you that your place is in Paradise". Strangely enough this is the same expression which was uttered by the Holy Prophet in a battle when he invited his companions to defend Islam, and Ibn Sad uttered the same words on the 9th of Muharram against the son and the right successor of the Holy Prophet and his sons and dear ones.

At this moment the Imam was sitting in front of his tent, with a sword in his hand and had gone to sleep with his head resting on his knees. Suddenly the uproar of the army approached nearer and nearer. Lady Zaynab ran to her brother in a state of perplexity and said: "Brother! Don't you hear the uproar of the enemy army which has reached near? The Imam raised his head from his knees and said: "Just now I saw the Holy Prophet in a dream and he told me that I was going to him. On hearing this Zaynab slapped her own face and said: "How sad it is for me!" The Imam said: "Sister! Don't be sad. Be tranquil. Allah will bless you".

In the meantime Abbas bin Ali arrived, submitted a military report, and said: "My master! The enemy has reached. What is to be done?" The Imam stood up and said: "My brother Abbas! May my life be sacrificed for you. Mount your horse, go and ask them as to why they have launched an attack at this time and what new development has taken place".

Abbas approached the enemy army accompanied by twenty horse-men including Zuhayr bin Qayn and Habib ibn Mazahir Asadi and enquired from them about the reason for their sudden attack. They replied: "We have received orders from our Emir that either you should surrender immediately or we should fight against you". Abbas said: "Don't be in a hurry. Let me go to the Imam and inform him of the position".

While Abbas went and informed Imam Husayn of the matter, his companions remained in front of the enemy forces and counseled them. Imam Husayn said to his brother: "Go back to them and, if possible, obtain extension of time from them till tomorrow morning, so that tonight we may offer prayers to Allah and make supplications and seek His forgiveness. Allah knows that I love to offer prayers, to recite the Qur'an, to make supplications and to ask His forgiveness".

Somehow they granted respite to the Imam and his friends till the following morning. The Imam also availed of this short opportunity and prepared himself for martyrdom. He tested his companions once again so that if anyone had been ignorant of the result of the rising, he should come to know that the Imam had no way before him except martyrdom and sacrifice, and whoever had not stayed on with a view to meeting martyrdom should go away and vacate the field of sacrifice for those noble persons who did not care for their lives.

Imam Zaynul Abidin Ali bin Husayn, the fourth Imam, who had accompanied his father during this journey, says: "My father called his companions after sunset and addressed them. Although I was ill I went there to hear his speech". It should be kept in mind that this speech was delivered by a person, who had less than a hundred supporters with him and was encircled by more than 20,000 men of the enemy and had been given extension of time till the following morning only.

The Holy Imam knew very well that he could not agree to surrender and take the oath of allegiance and tolerate the ignoble persons. He also knew that the enemy would not leave him alone and the matter would not be settled without fighting and in the circumstances his own martyrdom as well as that of his companions at the hands of the Iraqis, who had gathered to kill him, was certain. In spite of all this he spoke to his companions with perfect composure and confidence.

He pointed out to them that the following day was the day of martyrdom, and insisted upon them that each one of them should hold the hand of one of the members of his family and get out of trouble, and then they could go to their respective cities, so that Allah might grant them relief, because the enemies were after him only, and, after having overpowered him, they would have nothing to do with anyone else.

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