

Chapter 16: Imam's Sermon on the Night of Ashura

The Imam commenced his speech thus: "I thank Allah to the best of my ability and praise Him during the time of weal and woe. A Lord! I thank You because You have honored us by means of Prophet hood taught us the Qur'an, made us comprehend the religion and its commandments, granted us eyes, ears and hearts; kept us free from the pollution of polytheism and then enabled us to thank You for Your blessings. It is a fact that I am not aware of any companions more faithful and honest than my companions and any relatives more righteous and kind than my relatives. May Allah grant all of you a good reward. I think that the day of our fighting with this army has arrived. I permit all of you to go away. You are free to depart without any restriction and should take advantage of the darkness of night".

This speech has been quoted by Shaykh Mufid, Tabari, Abul Faraj and Ibn Athir, but none of them has written that any companion of the Imam went away on this occasion. Those who had to go had already departed on the way when the news about the martyrdom of Muslim bin Aqil, Hani, Qays bin Mashar and Abdullah bin Yaqtar was received. The Divine Hand had already driven away the cowardly persons from the Holy Imam.

The great historians have recorded nothing after the Imam's speech of the Ashura night except the self-sacrifice and steadfastness of the companions of the Imam. All of them write that when the Imam finished his speech and he insisted that they should leave him and escape trouble, his brothers, sons, nephews (sons of his brothers) and the sons of Abdullah bin Ja'far led by Abbas bin Ali said first of all with one voice: "Should we go away to live after you? We pray to Allah that the time may not come when you may be killed and we may remain alive".

Then the Imam turned to the descendants of Aqil and said: "O children of Aqil! It is sufficient that Muslim has been killed. You are now free to go away". They replied: "Allah be praised! If we leave our chief and the best of our cousins and go away and do not fight along with him with arrows, spears and swords and do not know how he and his friends have fared with the enemy, what will the people say? We swear by Allah that we shall do no such thing. On the contrary we shall sacrifice the lives and property of our

family in the path of Allah and render you assistance, and shall fight along with you so that we may also acquire the honor of martyrdom. What a shame to live the life which is without you!"

Then Muslim bin Awsaja got on his feet and said: "If we withdraw our support from you and leave you alone what excuse shall we put forward before Allah? I swear by Allah that I shall not go away and shall not leave you. I shall thrust my spear in the chest of your enemies and shall quench the thirst of my sword with their blood as far as possible. And when there are no arms left in my hand to fight with, I shall shower stones upon them. By Allah we shall not leave you, so that Allah may see that in the absence of His Prophet we have honored the rights of his son.

By Allah, even if I come to know that I shall be killed and then burnt in fire and shall be brought to life again and eventually my ashes will be scattered in the air and I die and become alive in this way seventy times, even then I shall not leave you till I lay down my life for your sake. Then why should I not do so when I am going to be killed only once and will thereafter be honored, happy and exalted, forever".

When the speech of Muslim bin Awsaja came to an end, Zuhayr bin Qayn Bajali stood up. He was the same man, who was at one time an enemy of Imam Husayn, remained away from him on the route to Iraq, and did not at all wish to meet him. Allah, however, willed that Zuhayr should meet martyrdom in His path in the company of Imam Husayn so that he might be honored for ever and his good and glorious name should illuminate the history of the tragedy of Ashura.

He commenced his speech thus: "By Allah, I wish that I am killed and then brought to life and then killed once again and this act should be repeated a thousand times and this becomes the means of Allah protecting you and the young men of your family, and all of you remain alive".

Others also expressed similar views. The Imam invoked Divine blessings for them and returned to his tent.

Imam Sajjad says: "During the night preceding the day on which my father was martyred I was ill and my aunt Zaynab was nursing me. My father had at that time retired into his own tent and only Jaun bin Jaun, the former slave of Abuzar Ghifari was with him. Jaun was setting my father's sword right and my father was reciting some couplets. He repeated these poetic verses twice or thrice and I understood what he was saying and what he meant by it. By reciting these verses he referred to the inconstancy and unkindness of the world, which at times smiles like a kind friend, and enchants the people with its pleasing countenance and one feels that the circumstances will always be favorable.

However, it suddenly changes its attitude and becomes unkind and unfaithful. It makes bitter with its poison the life which had once been sweet like honey. It drives away the friends, about whom one thinks that they would remain friendly forever and boasts of their friendship and devotion when the circumstances are favorable; rather it makes most of those friends stand before one in the shape of blood-thirsty and war-like enemies.

No one knows what is going to happen tomorrow, and when he is going to be deprived of the glory, strength and security which has been bestowed upon him. Who is the person, who has not lost the game during his life, and where is the powerful man, whose strength has not been damaged by the vicissitudes of events?

By reciting these verses the Imam meant to say that on the following day many magnanimous persons would meet martyrdom. It is not possible for any person to make someone else take his place to face the events of time. The end of the matter is in the hands of Allah. Every living being must traverse this path. It was not only he and his companions who were faced that day with the unfavorable time. On the contrary the world at one time assumes the same countenance against everyone.

The fourth Imam says: "I understood that my father meant to inform us of his martyrdom, and tears almost choked me, but I controlled myself. I realized that a calamity was about to fall. However, my aunt Zaynab also heard what I had heard, and as she was a woman, and the women are tender-hearted by nature, and lose patience, she could not control herself. She got up suddenly and went before her brother without wearing a veil and said: "Oh! That I should become brotherless! I wish that I had died earlier. O successor of the deceased and O the refuge of the survivors! It is today that I am going to be left without mother, father and brother". On seeing his sister in a distressed condition Imam Husayn said: "Sister! Be patient lest Satan should make you lose your self-control".

It may be said that these words of the Imam were a lesson for his sister, which prepared her to face the difficult situations in Kufa and Damascus later. It was Zaynab who had to assume the leadership of this movement from the time of the Imam's martyrdom till the return of Ahlul Bayt to Madina, and by means of this lesson the Imam was entrusting this Divine trust to her. The Imam said: "Dear sister! Be patient lest Satan should make you lose your self-control".

In other words he said: 'Recognize yourself and do not forget your personality and the importance which you enjoy in this great movement. The task which you have to perform is not easier than that which I can perform, and you can discharge your duty only by means of greatness of soul and spirituality which you have acquired and inherited from your parents, Ali and Fatima.

If you lose patience today because you have received a hint that your brother will be martyred or you have heard some touching verses, how will you endure the events of tomorrow? At the same time how will you be able to deliver speeches in the bazaars of Kufa and the Islamic capital (i.e. Damascus) with perfect composure, and say what remains to be said, and bring to light what is hidden, and disclose the deceitful acts of the enemies of Ahlul Bayt and apprise the people of true facts in the center of the caliphate and government of the descendants of Abu Sufyan, and frustrate their unjust propaganda by delivering speeches?'

The Imam in his brief speech gave a significant lesson to his sister. Tears came in his eyes and he said: "Sister! What am I to do? You can see with what condition I am faced and what a large army has

gathered to kill me". Zaynab also uttered some touching words and became unconscious.

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