

Chapter 24: Imam Sajjad in the Court of Ibn Ziyad

Imam Sajjad was brought to Ibn Ziyad's court and made to stand before that tyrant. "Who are you?" He asked the Imam. The Imam replied: "I am Ali ibn Husayn". He said: "Did Allah not kill Ali ibn Husayn?" The Imam replied: "I had a brother whose name was also Ali and the people killed him ". (The Imam meant to tell Ibn Ziyad not to attribute sin to Allah and not to say something irrelevant, because it was the people and not Allah who killed Ali ibn Husayn in Karbala). Ibn Ziyad said: "It is not so. Allah killed him". In reply to this the Imam recited a verse of the Qur'an: Allah takes the souls when the time of their death comes, (Surah al-Zumar, 39:42) but He is not their killer.

When Ibn Ziyad saw that the young ailing prisoner had given back replies time and again to what he said he got annoyed and said: "Do you still have courage to resist what I say?" Then he said to his men: "Take him away and chop off his head".

On hearing this lady Zaynab got very much worried and disturbed. However, the only reply which the fourth Imam gave to Ibn Ziyad was this: "If you kill me with whom will you send these women?" Then he added: "After killing me you should send with them a pious Muslim, who should behave towards them according to the orders of Islam".

The fourth Imam did not utter a sentence requesting Ibn Ziyad to spare his life. He only said: "When I am killed do not send with these sacred women a man, who is impious and a non-Muslim".¹

In Syria also Imam Sajjad got some such opportunities and availed of them to the maximum possible extent. When Imam Sajjad was a captive in Damascus a man named Ibrahim bin Talha bin Ubaydullah Taymi came before him in the Bazaar and said tauntingly: "O Ali bin Husayn! Who was victorious in this battle?" He meant to say that the Ahlul Bayt suffered a crushing defeat and their enemies won a glorious victory.

The Imam said to him in reply: "Now that the time for prayers is approaching you should pronounce Azan and Iqamah so that you may come to know and understand clearly as to who has been victorious". The

Imam meant to tell him this: 'As you belong to the Taym tribe of Quraysh you are perhaps happy for some reasons that Bani Hashim had suffered defeat. However, so long as you are a Muslim it is necessary for you to pronounce in *Azan* as well as *Iqamah*: "I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah".

We and not others are the descendants and heirs of Prophet Muhammad without mentioning whose name and invoking Divine blessings for him the prayers' of any Muslim are not acceptable. Hence, so long as Islam exists the honor and glory belonging to us, the descendants of Muhammad, will also remain established and confirmed'.

The Imam uttered these brief but fascinating words in reply to one person and perhaps uttered it in a low tone, but these very words uttered in low tones continue to resound in history. At times it so happens that only one sentence becomes the cause of coming into existence of many important books, speeches and articles.

At that time neither Ibrahim, nor Talha nor anyone else could assess the importance of these brief words and pay attention to its essence overlooking its form, but the Imam knew that even if he had come to Syria to utter only this brief sentence and to say nothing else during this journey, it would be sufficient to achieve the object he had in view, and those who could not make the requisite assessment at that time would shortly later applaud the plan chalked out by Imam Husayn and his companions and Ahlul Bayt.

Imam Sajjad got another opportunity when the Ahlul Bayt were made to stand by the gate of the Masjid of Damascus, the place where the prisoners were usually kept. An old man, who was a Syrian, came there and said: "I thank Allah that He has killed and destroyed you and annihilated seditious people like you". Then he began abusing the Ahlul Bayt.

The fourth Imam kept quiet and let him speak on till he became silent. In his reply, however, he did not say any improper thing nor complained to the old man of using abusive language. At that time the fourth Imam was ill and was also a traveler and had experienced the hardships of the journey from Kufa to Damascus.

He was also bereaved and afflicted. Furthermore, he had arrived in a city which was at that time the center of the enemy of Ahlul Bayt. The Syrian used abusive language, expressed pleasure and thanked Allah for what had happened. When all these causes of annoyance and fury are present who can keep calm and not lose temper or give a harsh reply? It is not possible for a person to control himself in such circumstances, whoever he may be.

However, the Imam behaved towards the old Syrian like a kind and sympathetic teacher, as if he had experienced nothing from him except kindness and respect and asked him mildly: "Have you read the Qur'an?" He replied "Yes, why not?" Thereupon the Imam said: "Have you not read the verse: ***Say, O Muhammad! I do not want from you any recompense for my preaching to you except that you should love my kin. (Surah al-Shura, 42:23)***

The man replied: "Yes, I have". The Imam said: "I swear by Allah that we are the kinsmen of the Holy Prophet".

It may be said with certainty that this very question must have created a tumult in the mind of the man. Then he asked the man: "Have you not read this verse: ***People of the house, Allah wants to remove all kinds of uncleanness from you and to purify you thoroughly.***" (*Surah al-Ahzab, 33: 33*) He replied: "Yes. I have". The Imam said: "We are the people of the Household whose infallibility has been testified by Allah".

The Syrian thereupon raised his hands in prayer and said thrice: "O Allah! I repent and am regretful for what I have done. O Lord! I am disgusted with those who are the enemies of the progeny of the Holy Prophet and who have killed them. I do not know how it so happened; I have read the Qur'an but did not pay attention to these verses".

The fourth Imam got another such opportunity in the court of Yazid when the Ahlul Bayt were brought before him for the first time. The Imam who had been chained during his journey from Kufa to Damascus said to Yazid: "O Yazid! I put you on oath, in the name of Allah, just to imagine how the Holy Prophet will feel if he sees us in this condition?"

These words proved to be very effective. All those who were present there, began to weep and Yazid ordered the fetters to be removed from the body of the fourth Imam. Another important thing was that the Imam addressed Yazid by name and did not call him, the Commander of the Faithful, as was customary.

It was thus recorded in history that the Ahlul Bayt did not call Yazid, the Commander of the Faithful, even when they were chained and made captives and did not recognize him to be the successor and caliph of the Holy Prophet. History of Islam bears witness to the fact that none of the Ahlul Bayt who had been made prisoners addressed Yazid except by his name.

1. The author of Luhuf says: "When Ibn Ziyad ordered that Ali ibn Husayn should be killed, Lady Zaynab said: "O son of Ziyad! If you want to kill him kill me along with him". The Imam, however, said: "Dear aunt! Be calm, I shall give him a reply myself". Then he said: "O son of Ziyad! Do you threaten to kill me? Don't you know that being killed is our legacy and martyrdom is an honor for us".

Sermon of Imam Sajjad in the Mosque of Damascus

The fourth Imam got the best opportunity on the day on which the official preacher mounted the pulpit and abused Imam Ali and his children and eloquently praised Mu'awiya' and his descendants, and thereupon the Imam said to Yazid: "Do you permit me also to ascend these pieces of wood and to say a few things which may please Allah and also become the means of the hearers earning spiritual reward". This brief statement of the Imam is very subtle. It may be said that it contains the gist of what the Imam wanted to say.

He did not call the pulpit in question a pulpit but said to Yazid: "Permit me to ascend these pieces of wood". What he meant to say was 'that everything which is given the shape of a pulpit, on which someone ascends and then delivers a speech, is

not a pulpit. These pieces of wood are the means for destroying the pulpits. This preacher has sold his faith for material benefits, because he has consented to please the people and to oppose Allah, and consequently his destination is Hell. In other words he said that what the preacher was saying was the cause of Divine wrath, because it is not possible to please Allah by abusing a man like Ali ibn Abi Talib¹.

When Imam Sajjad said: "I want to say a few things which may be the means of the hearers earning spiritual reward"; he meant that what the preacher was saying could only involve the people in sin and adversity and could not produce any result except the perversion of the people. The people insisted that Yazid should accord the Imam permission, but he declined persistently. At last, he (Yazid) said: "These are the people, who were fed on knowledge and wisdom while the others were sucklings and children. If I permit him to speak he will disgrace me in the eyes of the people". Eventually, however, he had to accede to the demand of the people and the fourth Imam mounted the pulpit. He said things which made a serious impact on the minds of the people and they began to cry and lament.

During the course of his address Imam Sajjad specified the place of Ahlul Bayt in the realm of Islam and said: "O people! Allah has given us six things and our superiority to others is based on seven pillars. The six things which He has given us are: knowledge, forbearance, generosity and mercy, eloquence, valor and heartfelt love of the believers i.e. people cannot be forced to become our friends, devotees and adherents. Allah has so willed that the faithful people should love us and it is not possible to prevent this by any means and to do something as a consequence of which people may love others and hate us.

Our superiority to others is also based on these seven pillars Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah, his successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Doyen of the Martyrs Hamza, Ja'far Tayyar, Hasan and Husayn, the two grandsons of the Holy Prophet of this nation, and Mehdi, the savior of the oppressed and deprived people of the world) of this nation and the Imam of the last age. All these are from our Holy Family".

Imam Sajjad, the fourth Imam, meant to say that Yazid should in the first instance deprive the Ahlul Bayt of these honors and transfer the same to himself and then quarrel with them. Otherwise, so long as these honors of Islam belonged to the Ahlul Bayt how could they be disgraced and ignored, how could their rights be given to others and how could the hearts devoted to them be turned towards others!

The Imam introduced himself and the matters took such a turn that Yazid and his supporters were obliged to disrupt his speech. They asked the mu'azzin to pronounce Azan. Naturally the Imam, too, had to become silent but at the same time he availed of another opportunity. When the mu'azzin said: "I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah" he took off his turban and said: "O mu'azzin! I beseech you in the name of this very Muhammad to keep quiet".

Then he turned to Yazid and said: "Is this great and magnanimous Prophet your grand- father or our grandfather? If you say that he is your grandfather all of them know that you will be telling a lie. And if you say that he is my grandfather why did you kill my father and plundered his property and made his women captives?" Then he stretched his hand and tore his collar and continued to speak till the people were deeply moved and dispersed in a state of distress.

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