

## Chapter 15: Imam Husayn migrates to Mecca

Imam Husayn (a.s.) had a great following among the people of Medina who had seen the Prophet (S) showering his love and affection on him. Imam Husayn's eminence in teaching the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (S) and his knowledge of the Islamic Jurisprudence and other sciences and his noble character had endeared him to the people of Medina. In addition to this, he had his near relatives (the Hashimites) and several esteemed companions of the Prophet (S) who revered Imam Husayn (a.s.) so highly. Imam Husayn (a.s.) enjoyed the respect and admiration of the people of Medina and Mecca.

Had Imam Husayn (a.s.) desired to wage war against the tyrannical establishment with a view to succeed to power, Medina was the most suitable place to commence the struggle.

However, Imam Husayn (a.s.) chose to avoid any conflict. Therefore, he chose to leave Medina when he was threatened and pressurized to accept Yazid as the *Caliph*.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) was fully aware of the Qur'anic injunction to migrate when faced with oppression.<sup>1</sup> He was also aware that his grandfather, the Prophet (S), acted according to those injunctions. Imam Husayn (a.s.) was facing severe persecution and extreme pressure to accept Yazid as the *Caliph*. Had Imam Husayn (a.s.) sworn allegiance to Yazid it would have amounted to approve all the anti-Islamic deeds of Yazid. If Imam Husayn (a.s.) had remained in Medina, it would certainly have led to his massacre along with the Banu Hashim and all the true believers. Imam Husayn (a.s.) consulted Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya and others who unanimously thought that it would be better for Imam Husayn (a.s.) to leave Medina and seek sanctuary in Mecca, instead of capitulating to the wretched Yazid.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) preferred to migrate and move away from Medina. The best place he could choose was Mecca. The sanctuary of the Holy *Kaaba*, where even the killing of a mosquito is prohibited right from the pre-Islamic days, should have provided safety to Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his family. However, this was not to be.

In preferring to migrate rather than to stay at Medina and create a possible confrontation with the forces of Yazid, Imam Husayn (a.s.) followed the footsteps of his grandfather the Prophet (S). The Prophet (S)

had set an example in his migration from Mecca to Medina in similar circumstances on the command of God. Imam Husayn (a.s.) could not, at any cost, accept an enemy of Islam as a ruler over Muslims. Moulvi al-Haj Ghulam Abbas Ali gives the reason for Imam Husayn (a.s.) in leaving Medina: *“In fact, the Umayyads fostered an inborn animosity to the Prophet (S) and his family. Their main object was to destroy even the last surviving soul among the Ahlul Bayt and their adherents. Husayn (a.s.) had noted that his brother’s retirement to private life could not improve the Islamic world and set it thinking to distinguish the right from the wrong. Even his murder in secret was coolly heard by the Arabs and could not bring on a revolution. Husayn (a.s.) was sure that he would have to share the same fate as that of his elder brother and that the Umayyad’s animosity would pursue and kill him wherever he would go. However, he desired that his valuable blood should not be so easily shed and the whole matter hushed up without a proper consequence. He was prepared to suffer martyrdom publicly and reap its fruit for religion. He wanted to show the public how brutal and irreligious the Umayyads were and how the shedding of human blood, even that of the children of the Prophet (S), was a crime calculated as nothing... Above all, he wanted to set a lesson for upholding the right under the most adverse circumstances, in order to please God and thus tread the most difficult path of love and annihilate his separate existence in the All Pervading Existence, unmindful of the severe persecution at the hands of the devilish folk. His means to this end was not aggression, but passive resistance in order that he might not be blamed for any oppressive act on his part.”*<sup>2</sup>

Islam deprecates suicide. The protection of one’s life and the prevention from exposing one’s self to imminent danger is an obligatory part of a Muslim’s faith. Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali further notes, *“For fear of being criticized by the public that when he was sure of his murder at Medina, he ought to have taken shelter at Mecca and to be free before God from the blame that he had brought the trouble and ruin on himself, Husayn (S) thought it wise to settle within the precincts of the Kaaba.”*<sup>3</sup>

On the night preceding his departure, Imam Husayn (a.s.) visited the tombs of his grandfather the Prophet (S), his mother Fatima (S) and brother Imam Hasan (a.s.). At the Prophet’s tomb after performing his prayers, Imam Husayn (a.s.) dozed off and in his vision, the Prophet (S) said, *“I see you being butchered by the very people who expect my intercession. Wretched that they are, I shall not intercede for them. Soon, you will join me, your parents, and your brother. God has reserved for you the place in the Paradise that could only be attained through martyrdom.”* Returning home, Imam Husayn (a.s.) narrated his dream to his relatives and friends.<sup>4</sup>

Imam Husayn (a.s.) met Umm Salama, his step-grandmother and the surviving wife of the Prophet (S). Umm Salama had heard from the Prophet (S) that Imam Husayn (a.s.) would be martyred at Karbala. She repeated what she had heard from the Prophet (S) and showed a vial of mud given to her by the Prophet (S). Imam Husayn (a.s.) retold his dream, gave a vial containing mud of Karbala, and asked Umm Salama to keep both vials together. He then told Umm Salama that on the day of his martyrdom the mud in both the vials would turn into blood.<sup>5</sup> A similar incident is reported through the Prophet’s wife Aa’isha.

Imam Husayn's elder daughter Fatima as-Sughra (the youngest) was ill at the time when Imam Husayn (a.s.) left Medina. He entrusted Fatima as-Sughra to the care of Umm Salama. Imam Husayn (a.s.) met Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya and discussed the situation. Muhammad suggested that the Imam (a.s.) should leave Medina immediately and proceed to Mecca, which was a safe sanctuary for every one. He then suggested that in case there was any threat of bloodshed and desecration of the Kaaba, the Imam should proceed to Yemen. If even in Yemen there would be a threat to his life, the Imam should move on to the desert and mountains and keep moving until things settled down. Hearing these words, the Imam (a.s.) blessed Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya for his advice.<sup>6</sup>

Later, in a testament written to Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya, Imam Husayn (a.s.) himself set out the reason for his leaving Medina in the following words: *"I am leaving (Medina) not to create sedition, corruption, or in jest. I am leaving with the sole object of guiding the Umma of my grandfather, the Prophet (S). I shall enjoin the good (al-Amr bil Ma'ruf) and forbid the wrong (an-Nahi anil Munkar). I follow the footsteps of my grandfather and my father Ali ibn Abi Talib. If anyone wants to respond to my righteous call, it is better in the eyes of God. On the other hand, if anyone has any objection, I shall be patient and seek God's Arbitration between me and the people, for God is the best Judge."*<sup>7</sup>

Unless we understand the terms "Amr bil Ma'ruf" and "Nahi anil Munkar", it is difficult to understand the stress laid on those two terms said by Imam Husayn (a.s.). Simply put, the two terms "Amr bil Ma'ruf" and "Nahi 'anil Munkar" mean the "do's" and "don'ts" of Islam. In other words, the terms denote what is permissible and what is prohibited in Islam. Imam Husayn (a.s.) said that above all things, God made 'Amr bil Ma'ruf' and 'Nahi anil Munkar' obligatory on man. In fact, "Amr bil Ma'ruf" and "Nahi 'anil Munkar" is, firstly, to invite people towards Islam and the defending against oppression by fighting the tyrant. Secondly, 'Nahi anil Munkar' means abstinence from doing what is prohibited. In the spiritual sense, the terms mean acknowledging and obeying the Creator and shunning Satanic evil. In the temporal sense, it means an equitable and just distribution of wealth by the wealthy and equitable distribution among the poor. In both these senses, Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi Anil Munkar is made obligatory on every human being.

Regarding the situation prevailing at that time, Imam Husayn (a.s.) said, *"You did not entrust your affairs to the learned and pious people, but you surrendered yourselves before those who acted according to their whims and were slaves of their worldly desires, which made them fearlessly do mean things. As a result of this, the weaker section of the society is terrorized, trampled and driven away from their land. Today, you find in every town and city, their puppets that are steeped in ignorance, but pretentiously give edicts based on mere conjecture and surmise. They create mischief and spread discord. Might is prevailing over right and common man has been enslaved into submission. They are torturing and killing the learned and the pious. They have forgotten that there is a Creator who will raise them from their graves and call them to account for their deeds. O God, You are our witness that **we never had any greed for power or position; nor did wealth or any worldly pleasure attract us.** Whatever we did was only to establish the faith, to guide men on to the right path and to protect the poor from exploitation*

and misery.”<sup>8</sup>

What troubled the Banu Umayya was the later aspect, namely, the *Ahlul Bayt's* concern for the poor and the pious. Yazid perceived a threat that if Imam Husayn (a.s.) took up the cause of the poor, the Banu Umayya would lose the control of the treasury and power.

While leaving Medina, Imam Husayn (a.s.) did not take any armed contingent of his friends and followers. He took only his family members, but no specific number is mentioned in the books.<sup>9</sup> However, it is not in dispute that the following persons accompanied Imam Husayn (a.s.) in his migration from Medina:

1. Zainul Aabidin; his (Imam Husayn) son aged 20 years, who succeeded Imam Husayn (S) as the fourth Imam
2. Ali al-Akber; his son aged 17 years
3. Muhammad al-Baqir; son of Zainul Aabidin aged five years, the fifth Imam
4. Abul Fadhl al-Abbas; his (Imam Husayn) stepbrother
5. Al-Qasim bin al-Hasan (S)
6. Abdullah bin al-Hasan (S)
7. Abu Bakr bin al-Hasan (S)
8. Ahmed bin al-Hasan (S)
9. Ja'far bin Aqeel
10. Abdurrahman bin Aqeel
11. Own bin Aqeel
12. Ali bin Aqeel
13. Abdullah bin Aqeel
14. Muslim bin Aqeel; Imam Husayn's cousin
15. Abdullah bin Muslim
16. Muhammad bin Muslim
17. Muhammad bin Abi Sa'eed bin Aqeel

18. Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Aqeel
19. Ahmed bin Muhammad bin Aqeel
20. John; Abu Dharr's servant, an African
21. Umm Kulthoom; widowed sister
22. Zainab (a.s.) ; sister of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and wife of Abdullah bin Ja'far
23. Layla; wife of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and mother of Ali al-Akbar (a.s.)
24. Shahr Banu; wife of Imam Husayn (a.s.)
25. Sukaina; daughter of Imam Husayn (a.s.), aged 4 years
26. Ali al-Asghar (a.s.) ; infant, son of Imam Husayn (a.s.)
27. The wife of Imam Hasan (a.s.)
28. Fidhdha; Imam Husayn's governess and the bondmaid of his mother Fatima (S). Fidhdha was an Abyssinian princess.

Had Imam Husayn (a.s.) planned to create any revolt or attempt to gain power, neither would he have left Medina where he had plenty of supporters, nor would he have chosen to take his family members consisting mostly of women and children. This shows that Imam Husayn (a.s.) left Medina primarily in response to the urgent and insistent call of the Iraqis for religious guidance and also to avoid capitulating to Yazid's demand leading to serious conflict and avoidable blood shed. Never can any worldly aspirations or desire for power or wealth be attributed to Imam Husayn (a.s.).

1. For details see Chapter 2 above.

2. Life of Imam Husayn the Saviour, p. 131 – 132.

3. Life of Imam Husayn the Saviour, p. 134.

4. Amali of Sheikh as-Saduq, Awalimul Ulum, quoted in Imam Husayn (a.s.) & Tragic Saga of Karbala, p. 45.

5. Nafasul Mahmoom, p. 107.

6. Nafasul Mahmoom, p 97, 102.

7. Biharul Anwar, Vol. 44 p. 329.

8. Balaghatul Husayn, P. 61–71, Sermons, Sayings & letters of Imam Husayn[s], compiled by Mustafa Mohsin Musavi, Urdu Translation by Moulvi Sayyid Muhammad Baqir.

9. Nafasul Mahmoom, p. 96.

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