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## Chapter 17: Imam Husayn's Migration from Mecca

The History of Islam is replete with instances where, in a man-to-man combat, Imam Ali (a.s.) always gave the right of the 'first strike' to his opponent and he attacked only in retaliation. There is no concept of a 'preemptive strike' in Islam. The concept of 'preemptive strike' was nurtured by the heathens who always struck from behind or without provocation. We saw in the earlier chapter that Muslim ibn Aqeel refrained from killing ibn Ziyad in Hani ibn Urwa's house, though he could have done so very easily. There is no instance in the entire history of Islam where Imam Ali (a.s.) or anyone of the Ahlul Bayt attacked first or attacked an unsuspecting person from a hiding place. Imam Ali (S) never attacked an enemy who was disarmed or was unable to defend himself. He gave strict instructions to his men to follow the Qur'anic injunctions, never to attack women, children, the disabled, the sick or one who run away from the battlefield. It is this principle that saved the lives of Abu Sufyan and Mu'awiya when they only turned their backs and run away from the battlefield during their fighting against the Prophet (a.s.).

Imam Husayn (a.s.) was steeped in the moral, ethical and spiritual standards set up by his grandfather the Prophet (S) and his father Imam Ali (a.s.). The entire course of events that led to the battle of Karbala shows that at each and every step Imam Husayn (a.s.) tried his best to avoid direct conflict and consequent bloodshed. All his actions were open and transparent. He never resorted to deceit or secret plans.

At the time of Imam Husayn's departure from Medina to Mecca, several of his friends offered to accompany and support him. Instead of increasing his armed forces by encouraging more people to join him, Imam Husayn (a.s.) dissuaded them saying that Yazid was only after his (Imam Husayn) blood, and that knowing the cruel nature of Yazid he did not wish to expose them to any harm and that it was not obligatory for them to join him.

The Meccans received Imam Husayn (a.s.) with great love and reverence as they had seen the Prophet (S) openly showing his love and care for him before. They also remembered the Holy Prophet's oft-repeated words that Hasan and Husayn are the two masters of the youth in the Paradise. They gathered

around him in great numbers, seeking guidance in Islamic philosophy and other religious matters. They were enamored of Imam Husayn's way of discourse, ethics and manners. Every day the gathering swelled to greater proportions.

The fast approaching *Hajj* brought more and more people from far-off places and countries. When the pilgrims learnt that the Holy Prophet's grandson was in Mecca, they swarmed around him to have a look at him and to clarify their doubts in matters of religion, science, commerce, rights, obligations, morals, ethics...etc. This irked ibn az–Zubair who was planning to enlarge his own following. He therefore used to meet Imam Husayn (a.s.) more out of curiosity to know what was happening in Imam Husayn's camp, than out of real respect.

Al-Haj Moulvi Ghulam Abbas Ali Sahib wrote, "Husayn never attempted to gain any land or disturb the government by any rebellious movement, in spite of the love and power he was commanding at Mecca. He only lectured to his disciples on various rites and ceremonies of Islam inculcated by the Qur'an and the Prophet, on allowable and objectionable articles of food, and on ethical principles. His chief aim was to train people to be godly and pious and strict observers of the Islamic Principles. The more he heard of the irreligion of Yazid, the greater was his zeal in ordering his disciples to follow the Qur'anic injunctions. He feared that the Arabs, who had long been accustomed to idolatry and irreligion headed by atheistic monarch, would easily be misled and thus the success achieved by his grandfather in training them to be pious servants of God would be lost forever."1

In Medina, Imam Husayn (a.s.) had received hundreds of letters and personal representations complaining against the tyranny and un–Islamic character and conduct of Mu'awiya and his men. After Mu'awiya's death, Imam Husayn (a.s.) received at Mecca over twelve thousand letters from the people of Kufa, complaining against the oppressive, vicious and merciless killing of innocent persons by Ibn Ziyad, Yazid's governor of Basra, for criticizing his irreligious ways of life and distortion of the Qur'an and the Sunna. They pleaded with Imam Husayn (a.s.) to save Islam from being distorted and misinterpreted by the unethical usurpers of power.

The people of Kufa were disgusted with the oppressive nature of the Umayyad rule and the ignorance of the governors in religious matters. The complaints to Mu'awiya and later to Yazid about the incompetence in administration, the excessive partiality, the discrimination and the incompetence of his governors even to perform the daily prayers properly fell on deaf ears.

The dissatisfied people of Kufa assembled at the house of Sulayman ibn Surad al-Khuza'iy, a companion of the Prophet (S), and resolved to petition Imam Husayn (a.s.) to come to their rescue. Leading personalities like Sulayman, al-Musayyab, Rifa'ah, and Habib ibn Mudhahir signed a letter requesting Imam Husayn (a.s.) to relieve them from the anarchy and oppression of the governor of Kufa. The letter was delivered to Imam Husayn (a.s.) on the tenth of Ramadan, the year 60 A.H. Thereafter, as many as 12000 such letters written by individuals as well as collectively by groups of persons were received by Imam Husayn (a.s.) within two months.3 Letters signed by Shibath bin Rib'iy, Hajjar bin

Abjur, Yazid bin al-Harith, Urwa bin Qeis, Umar bin Hajjaj, Muhammad bin Amr, and several others laid particular stress on the fact that as the Imam of the time, it was incumbent upon Imam Husayn (a.s.) to come to the rescue of the oppressed and to render justice, and if he failed to do so, he would be responsible before God. All the letters emphasized that the people of Kufa were left without an Imam to guide them in matters of religion.

Though several letters had promised military assistance to remove the governor of Kufa, Imam Husayn (a.s.) was not impressed by the prospect of his taking up such venture as it was against his principles. Therefore, Imam Husayn (a.s.) totally ignored such letters. It is the special aspect of the last mentioned letter written by the people of Kufa calling upon Imam Husayn (a.s.), as the Imam of the time, to come to the aid of Islam that led him to make up his mind and abandon the safety of the Kaaba and to proceed to Iraq, despite knowing the dangers involved.

One of the obligations cast on the Imam (a.s.) was to stand up against corruption in faith when the oppression, tyranny, and aggression of the rulers became excessive and when collectively people called upon the Imam to rise in defense of the faith. It is this part of Imamate that the people of Kufa stressed upon in their letters which made it obligatory on Imam Husayn (a.s.) to leave the safety of Kaaba and proceed towards Iraq. Therefore, it is not that Imam Husayn (a.s.) wanted to achieve power, but his departure to Iraq was in response to the call of the people to redeem the faith from being corrupted and to protect the common man from oppression, tyranny and cruelty of the state perpetrated on the poor and the innocent. The importance of this aspect of the Imam's obligation stressed in the letters written by the people of Kufa and Imam Husayn's response to the demand can be appreciated only with a proper understanding of Imamate, which we have dealt with in an earlier chapter.

Imam Husayn (S) replied to the last letter that is extracted by al-Haj Moulvi Ghulam Abbas Ali, "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and Compassionate. This letter is written by Husayn son of Ali to the believers and Moslems of Kufa. Hani and Sa'eed brought to me your last letter. From this and your previous letters, I understood your unanimous declaration that you have no Imam for your guidance. I considered all my relatives and friends, but found none more learned and pious than my cousin Muslim son of Aqeel. I am sending him to you and have commanded him to intimate your real affairs. If he writes to me that most of you are desirous of following the right path and supporting the truth, and if the wise and virtuous among you unanimously agree with you as you have represented in your letter, I shall be soon among you, God willing. I should enlighten your minds with the fact that an Imam or true guide is one who acts according to the Divine percepts, keeps himself steady on the path of justice and righteousness, and who binds himself with the laws laid down by God and His Prophet."4

Imam Husayn's reply brings out three salient points; **firstly**, that the people of Kufa had unanimously declared that they had no Imam to guide them, in which event it became obligatory for the Imam to fill the void, **secondly** that Imam Husayn (S) did not plan to go to Kufa as a conquering *Caliph*, but as an Imam not exercising unbridled power but as one who fetters his powers with the chains of Divine Laws

to act justly and righteously. In such case, all his actions would necessarily be within the framework of the Divine Laws and there would be no possibility of any injustice being meted out to friend or foe, and **thirdly**, he was not an opportunist to empower himself with the support of the disgruntled and impatient masses. Therefore, Imam Husayn (S) proposed to send a worthy representative to act as his ambassador. This shows that there was neither caprice nor haste in the Imam's action, but a desire to act justly on the basis of the true state of affairs.

At *Mina*, Imam Husayn (a.s.) gave a sermon to the huge congregation of Hajjis who had assembled around him. Then the Imam (a.s.) said,

"You are fully aware of the tyranny and oppression of Mu'awiya and his son Yazid. I wish to tell you something and request you to affirm if what I say is right and to correct me if I am wrong. By God and by the close relationship between me and the messenger of Allah, I ask you to bear witness about what I shall say, standing here before you, and to write it down, remember and propagate this my speech and message to everyone in every tribe, village, town and city. I am doing this because I apprehend that the truth will be buried and falsehood will be made to prevail over the truth. But, God has promised to protect His light, though the infidels may dislike it."

After glorifying Allah and reciting the numerous Qur'anic verses, which were revealed about the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.), Imam Husayn (a.s.) narrated the various traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) eulogizing Imam Ali (S) and his progeny. We give below a part of the lengthy sermon:

"Listen to me carefully and confirm if what I say is true. If you do not know then ask those companions of the messenger of Allah who are aware of what I am about to say, for they will confirm the veracity of my statements. Is not Muhammad the messenger of Allah?"

In one voice, the congregation replied, "Certainly."

The Imam (a.s.) said, "Is not Fatima the only child of the Prophet and that she is the Chief of the women in Paradise?" They replied, "Indeed it is as you say."

The Imam (a.s.) said, "Is not Ali the cousin and deputy of the Prophet? Have you not heard the Prophet (S) say, when he created a bond of brotherhood between his followers that Ali was a brother to him, like Aaron was to Moses?

People replied, "We bear witness that what you say is true."

The Imam (a.s.) asked, "Am I not the son of Ali and Fatima?" They replied, "Indeed you are so."

The Imam (a.s.) asked, "Have you not heard the Prophet (S) say that I and my brother Hasan are the masters of the youth in Paradise?"

People replied, "We are witnesses to what you have said."

The Imam (a.s.) said, "Is it not true that when the Prophet (S) constructed the mosque, he had all the doors closed except the one leading to the house of Ali and Fatima, and when Umar wanted to open a chink in the wall of his house so that he could peep into the mosque, the Prophet (S) sternly forbid it?" They replied, "It was so."

The Imam (a.s.) asked, "Is it not true that on the day of Mubahaila with the Christians, the Prophet (S) took my mother Fatima to represent women, my father Ali to represent men and I and my brother Hasan to represent children of the Prophet? This the Prophet (S) did in accordance with what was revealed to him by God."

They said, "Indeed, it is true."

The Imam (a.s.) said, "Have you not heard the Prophet (S) say that 'Fatima, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn are from me and I am from them' and that 'they are my Ahlul Bayt'? Have you not heard the Prophet (S) say that 'one who loves my Ahlul Bayt loves me and one who loves me loves Allah, and he who opposes my Ahlul Bayt opposes me and he who opposes me opposes Allah'?"

The people said, "We affirm the truthfulness of what you said."

The Imam (a.s.) said, "I make it obligatory on all of you gathered here to repeat what all you heard from me now, to your kith and kin, friends and acquaintances, in villages, towns and cities and wherever you find two believers gathered in one place."

The Imam (a.s.) has set out the reason why he took so much pain to repeat what was already common knowledge, by saying, "I apprehend that the truth shall be buried and falsehood shall be made to prevail over the truth. But, God has promised to protect His light, though the infidels may dislike it."

This foresight of the Imam (a.s.) is what has perpetuated his remembrance and erased Mu'awiya and Yazid from the good books of history.

On the 20th of Thul Qa'dah, the year 59 AH, Imam Husayn (a.s.) received a letter from Muslim ibn Aqeel, stating that over a lakh of the people of Kufa had sworn fealty to him, accepting Imam Husayn (a.s.) as their guide and Imam and seeking his presence in Kufa. Muslim urged Imam Husayn (a.s.) to proceed to Kufa at the earliest. The entire course of Imam Husayn's actions is strictly within the parameters set out in his reply. His sermons to the people of Kufa and Syria and his dialogues with Yazid's army assembled in the battlefield at Karbala bring out succinctly the principles on which Imam Husayn (a.s.) maintained his actions.

Meanwhile, Yazid learnt of the popularity and public support Muslim received from the people of Kufa. Yazid assumed that Imam Husayn (a.s.) was planning to undermine his political grip and power. He ordered that in addition to Muslim Ibn Aqeel, Hani ibn Urwa, and Shareek, all supporters of the Ahlul Bayt should be either eliminated or at least imprisoned. Thus, Maytham bin Yahya at-Tammar, Rashid

al-Hijri, Hujr bin Adiy, Amr bin al-Hamq, Kumail bin Ziyad ath-Thaqafi, Sulaym bin Qays and several others who were known as supporters of the Ahlul Bayt were first confined to prison and later tortured and killed.

Yazid had sent a contingent headed by Amr bin Sa'eed bin al-Aas, with strict instruction to kill Imam Husayn (a.s.) in the very precincts of the Holy Kaaba. When Imam Husayn (a.s.) learnt of this, he decided to leave Mecca by performing the Umra (minor hajj) instead of the Hajj.

Umm Salama (the Prophet's wife), Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Ja'far with two of his sons and Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya the cousins of Imam Husayn (a.s.) had also come to Mecca to perform the Hajj. Imam Husayn (a.s.) met Umm Salama and handed over his books and other belongings for safe custody to be given to his successor.

When Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya learnt that the Imam planned to leave Mecca, he met and dissuaded the Imam from proceeding towards Kufa. He suggested that the Imam (a.s.) should either go to Yemen or keep to the desert until the disgruntled people of Kufa would get rid of their cruel governor. To similar effect, Abdullah Ibn Abbas also suggested. To both of them, Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied that as the Imam he was obliged to respond to the call of people made through thousands of letters, to lead and guide them in religious matters. He had also received Muslim bin Aqeel's letter to come to Kufa. Lastly, the Imam (a.s.) said that he was aware that Yazid had already dispatched a contingent with strict instructions to kill him in the precinct of the Holy Kaaba. The Imam (a.s.) made it clear that he would not be instrumental in defiling the sanctity of the Kaaba. The Imam (a.s.) also told them that he dreamt of the Prophet (S) urging him to proceed towards Iraq.

On his return when Abdullah Ibn Abbas saw Abdullah ibn az–Zubair, he sarcastically recited an ode, the meaning of which was that then that Imam Husayn (a.s.) was leaving Mecca, the field was clear for ibn az–Zubair to achieve his dream of grabbing the leadership of Muslims. This came true as Abdullah Ibn az–Zubair cherished a secret desire for the Caliphate and strenuously put forth his claim later.

On the eve of his departure from Mecca, Imam Husayn (a.s.) gave the following sermon after praising Allah and seeking His blessings on the Prophet (S), "I long to join my forefathers just like Jacob longed to join his son Joseph. The place to bury my body has already been fixed and it is imperative that I reach there as soon as possible. I visualize the Banu Umayya, like wolves tearing my body into pieces. We the Ahlul Bayt choose only that which Allah has chosen for us. To be patient in adversity is incumbent upon us, for God rewards those who are patient. Whoever is desirous of joining me in my journey should be ready to sacrifice his life for the cause, for tomorrow, God willing, I shall leave Mecca."6

Imam Husayn (a.s.) left Mecca for Kufa on the eighth of Thul Hijjja, the year 60 AH, the day on which Muslim ibn Aqeel and Hani ibn Urwa were martyred in Kufa. According to some authors, Imam Husayn's caravan consisted of eighty-two males, including his family members and relatives.

- 2. Imam Husayn (a.s.) & Tragic Saga of Karbala, 61.
- 3. Imam Husayn (a.s.) & Tragic Saga of Karbala, p 61, Life of Imam Husayn the Saviour, p. 110.
- 4. Life of Husayn the Saviour, p. 111.
- 5. Nafasul Mahmoom, p. 229-242.
- 6. Nafasul Mahmoom, p. 230.
- 7. Matalibul Sa'oo, al-Mahzoon, al-Malhoof quoted in Imam Husayn (a.s.) & Tragic Saga of Karbala, p. 105-106.

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