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Desertion Permitted

It is on such a straight path that the Master of Martyrs declared, in his precious, wise and far-sighted statement, permission to his family and companions to part with him for safety. The text the historians narrate in this regard is his statement ('a), to his family and companions on the eve of the ninth of Muharram saying,

"I know no companions better than mine nor family more righteous or kind or united than mine; so, may Allah reward all of you. I think tomorrow will be our last day in facing these folks. I am of the view that you should all set out for safety, you do not owe me anything, while the night is covering you with its covering. Ride it as you would a camel, and each one of you should take the hand of one of my family members. May Allah reward all of you with the best of His rewards; so, disperse under the cover of darkness and go back to your towns, for these people seek me, and if they get hold of me, they will not seek anyone else." 1

What a pithy statement, O Father of the Oppressed, and how noble your objective, O Master of Martyrs! How wise your statement and deeds, O soul of Prophethood!

Yes, this golden statement was etched in letters of *noor* on the forehead of time, that those righteous elite men, who were described by the Commander of the Fatihful ('a) as the masters of martyrs, and that none ever reached their heights nor ever will2, were the cream of the crop of all mankind and the elite of the cosmos.

We have been enlightened by such rays to realize their intention to be determined in their firmness and sincerity to offer the holy sacrifice. In all of these, there are sublime lessons for all those who wish to follow in the footsteps of those honourable men to rise above loving this life and to die under the banner of dignity and not to submit to the oppressive authority, to either achieve the goal or attain martyrdom and eternal happiness.

Had it not been for that permission to desert issued by the custodian of the *Shari'a* and for those words that their pure souls permitted, no succeeding generation could have realized the extent of their

knowledge, conviction, and variation of their faculties and ambition to the highest goals and firmness in upholding their principles with sincerity and insight.

The Master of Martyrs wanted by so doing to test their intentions. Testing is done by a wise person who knows what was and what will be, and it does not demean his knowledge and his being familiar with what is hidden since the goal is precious and the status is sublime. This is something to which we pointed out when we wanted to acquaint the reader with the gifts adorning al–Husayn's followers and those of Ahl al–Bayt ('a).

And such a test should not surprise anyone especially since the Creator of all beings, the Almighty, from whose knowledge nothing small nor big escapes, ordered His friend Abraham to sacrifice his son Isma'il. Being knowledgeable of the extent of obedience to Him rendered by His messenger, the Friend of Allah, Abraham, and of the firmness of His prophet, Ishamel, he did not require it except for a benefit known to the Lord of the Worlds though it is obscure from the comprehension of humans.

The incident of the bald, the leprous, and the blind also testifies that Allah Almighty wanted by granting them His blessings to make their story a lesson of wisdom for those who come across it and who find themselves bound to thank Him for His blessings, and that denying His blessings will lead to loss.3

Abu 'Abdullah, Imam al-Husayn ('a), wanted through this test to acquaint the next generations with the status attained by his Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and companions, the status of honour, dignity, purity and submission to whatever pleases Allah and His Messenger, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny.

To know the extent of any man of purity in the world, and to uphold the principle of obedience to the most pious person who most pleases the Master, the Almighty, does not become possible except by his statements supported by good deeds or by a testimony for him from someone familiar with his every movement.

Nobody is ignorant of the defects in the history books in our hands regarding many deeds of righteous men who exhaust all influence and possession in order to support the authentic *Shari'a*. Nor does history record any deeds undertaken by those elite ones, namely the martyrs of Karbala', indicative of the holiness of their conscience, the sincerity of their intentions, the purity of their souls..., better than that bloody scene.

Had it not been for those statements made by the companions of al-Husayn ('a), and of his family, when he gave them permission to leave him for safety and to desert so that he would alone face those who surrounded him, we would not have come to know the differences in their levels of awareness and variations in their far-sighted views, nor their virtues which no human being can attain.

Knowledge is a light that Allah Almighty casts in the heart of whomsoever He chooses from among His servants in various degrees of intensity.

Muslim Ibn 'Awsajah al-Asadi, for example, does not have anything on the pages of history to testify to his immortal deeds and good merits in anything more or less than a statement made by Shabth Ibn Rab'i that he invaded Azerbaijan on the side of the Muslims and killed six polytheists before Muslim cavalry troops came to his rescue.

What can the reader know from this statement other than the extent of his sure loyalty to the Prophet's caliphs and his not having changed as time and circumstances changed? But his statement to al–Husayn ('a) in which he said,

"Are we the type of men who would abandon you? What excuse shall we produce before Allah Almighty for having thus fallen short of serving you? By Allah! I shall never leave you till I break my lance in their chests and strike them with my sword as long as I can hold its handle, and even if I have no weapon to fight them with, I shall throw stones at them till I die with you."

Such a statement informs us of the firmness of this man in upholding his principles at the last stage of life, and that if one is not concerned except about pleasing Allah Almighty and His Messenger (S), he is not concerned about any pain or bleeding. This statement is accompanied by actions when he faced the swords and the lances with his chest and neck.

Moreover, he was not satisfied with all of this till he commended Habib Ibn Muzahir, the man who benefitted from the science of fates and epics from the Commander of the Faithful ('a), to support al–Husayn ('a), and that he would not otherwise be excused by the Messenger of Allah (S) for having fallen short of carrying out his responsibility even when he was drawing his last breath His soul thus parted from his body as he maintained his creed and submission.4

He was followed in sincerity of loyalty and readiness to sacrifice by Sa'id Ibn 'Abdullah al-Hanafi who said, "By Allah! We shall never abandon you till Allah knows that we safeguarded the absence of the Messenger of Allah (S) in your person.

By Allah! Had I known that I will be killed then brought back to life, then burnt alive, then my ashes strewn, and this is done to me seventy times, I would still not abandon you till I meet death defending you. Why should I not do so? It is only one death followed by a bliss that lasts forever."

He, therefore, defended Abu 'Abdullah ('a) and admonished others to do likewise. He was not satisfied with all the bleeding wounds which he received when he assaulted the enemies of Allah Almighty in defense of al-Husayn ('a), who was then performing the noon prayers on the battlefield, till he understood from the Father of the Oppressed that he had discharged his responsibility towards the

Message and proven his faithfulness to what Allah had mandated on him, so he died feeling elated for having pleased the Almighty God.

Anything besides this is a shortcoming and a loss. Abu 'Abdullah ('a) comforted him of attaining happiness through martyrdom and of the meeting with the Messenger of Allah (S) before him.

As soon as he had finished his speech, Zuhayr Ibn al-Qayn al-Bajali stood up to recite for all future generations lofty teachings in promoting the creed that immortalized him. To al-Husayn ('a) he said, "By Allah! I wish I had been killed then brought back to life then killed, and so on, for a thousand times, as long as my being killed protects you and protects these youths of Ahl al-Bayt ('a)."

There is no doubt in Allah accepting obedience from any of His servants if such obedience earns him victory on the Day of Eternity. But there is something even beyond that of a more lofty objective: it is the obedience of the people of conviction who are not concerned, when they perform what they are obligated to perform, except to be closer to the Lord, Praise to Him, Who is the only One worthy of being worshipped.

Ibn al-Qayn is a bastion of conviction and pure faith, a man who recited for us in such a situation his far-sighted view, his true beliefs, and his noble goals: protecting the man who was appointed by Allah Almighty as the Imam and protecting the lives which were held dear by the Messenger of Allah (S) without aiming by worshipping Allah, through performing jihad against His enemies, except to earn the rewards of the hereafter for his endeavour on the Day when wages shall be granted for good deeds.

Rather, he aimed by performing this rite to protect the person who was charged with safeguarding the Message, the *Hujjah* of his time, citing the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his Progeny.

"Husayn is of me, and I am of Husayn," 5 says the Messenger of Allah (S). The one who brought us the Shari'a did not make this statement simply to inform the nation that the Taff Martyr was part of him (i.e. a member of his family), for such an interpretation is quite shallow and is not expected of the master of orators. Of course every offspring is part of his father and grandfather; so, there is no distinction for al-Husayn ('a) here.

Rather, he (S) intended for this golden statement to point out to the responsibility vested upon the Master of Martyrs in cementing Islam's foundations, removing the thorns of falsehood from the path of the just *Shari'a*, and alerting the nation against the crimes committed by those who played havoc with the sanctity of the creed. Just as the Prophet (S) was the first person to rise to disseminate the divine call, al–Husayn was the last to rise to cement its foundations:

About him; it did complain to none but Husayn.

The Prophet's grandson saw that to cure the creed,

At Karbala' to death he had to defend it and bleed.

Never did we hear that a patient could be cured

Only with the death of the one who cured and endured.

When Husayn was martyred, Islam's guidance standard rose high

When Husayn is remembered, Islam's fragrance does intensify.

Had it not been for the open statements made by the son of the singers, we would not have been able to realize his attitude *vis-a-vis* loyalty [or the lack thereof] for those whom the Omnipotent, Praise to Him, chose as the Infallible and as the beacons of guidance for His servants and the custodians of His *Shari'a*.

Other than this fact, history has not recorded for the singers' son any loyalty except to 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan *versus*' his animosity towards the grandson of the most pure Messenger of Allah (S).

As for the stand of 'Abis Ibn Abu Shibib al-Shakiri, when the oath of allegiance was sworn to Muslim Ibn 'Aqil at Kufa, and on the *Taff* Day, it reveals his superiority over many others, his firm conviction and love for Ahl al-Bayt ('a), and that nothing at all mattered to him in his bid to protect the Imam ('a) even at the cost of sacrificing his own life and everything precious in his possession.

Having witnessed the betraying throngs assembled to swear the oath of allegiance to Muslim Ibn 'Aqil, he ['Abis] said to him,

"I do not wish to inform you about these people, nor do I know what they hide in their hearts and what attracts you to them, but by Allah I shall tell you about what I have decided to do: By Allah! I shall respond to you when you call, and I shall fight your enemy, and I shall defend you with my sword till I meet Allah desiring nothing for doing so except what Allah has in store for me." 6

With these brief words did he interpret those people's intentions and the feebleness of their wills, and that they were molded on betrayal, hypocrisy and the following of their own whims, and that they did not wish to openly declare their inclination to betray him else it should weaken their already weak allegiance and become the cause of animosity.

So they said what was beautiful as they waited for the outcome. Muslim Ibn 'Aqil could not get even one of those thousands of men to lead him to any highway to exit the city when the clouds of doom overshadowed him, not even one, so he did not know where to go...

On the *Taff* Day, Ibn Abul-Shibin said to al-Husayn ('a), "Nobody on the face of earth, be he a kin of mine or a stranger, is dearer to my heart than you. Had I been able to defend you with anything more

precious than my life, I would have most certainly done so."7

Yes, O son of Abul-Shibin! Men who are sincere to Allah Almighty are endowed with self-denial. They regard the world as a vanishing thing and hope to attain immortality through supporting the Imam, the essence of beings, the orbit of existence itself.

Then Nafi' Ibn Hilal stood and said, "By Allah! We are not too afraid to submit to Allah's destiny, nor are we averse to the meeting with our Lord. We are with our minds and intentions supporting whoever supports you and are the enemy of whoever antagonizes you." The rest of his companions made similar statements.

When he ('a), granted permission to his family members to leave, they all said in one voice, "Shall we do so in order to survive you? May Allah never permit us to see that happen." Then he turned to 'Aqil's offspring and said, "Suffices you [the calamity that you have suffered because of] Muslim's murder. I have permitted you to leave."

They immediately expressed their unrelenting determination to support the creed and to defend the Imam, the *Hujjah*, saying, "If we do so, shall we then say to the people that we abandoned our mentor and master, while our cousins are the best of cousins, without having shot one arrow with them, nor have we stabbed anyone with our lances nor struck anyone with our swords? No, by Allah!

We shall never do that; rather, we shall sacrifice ourselves, our wealth, and our families for your sake and fight with you till we meet the same fate as yours; abominable, indeed, it is to survive you."

Such readiness to sacrifice in that precarious situation, wherein all avenues of help and rescue were blocked, and even water, which was made available to the animals, was denied them, reveals their attainment of the most sublime attributes of perfection.

It reveals their renunciation of this vanishing life. Had they had in their heart the least desire to stay, or to love this world, they would have taken his permission to leave them as an excuse they would produce on the Day of Judgment.

But these souls, which the Lord of the Worlds, Praise to Him, created of a holy mould and blended with the *noor* of conviction, did not desire to stay alive except to uphold what is right or to put an end to what is false. How could they find life meaningful while knowing that the man who was so much loved by the Messenger of Allah (S), the heart of Islam, was suffering of bleeding wounds and of a painful agony?

Souls that wanted nothing but the legacy of their father Are either killed without being avenged,

Or are killing those whom none will avenge.

Their souls were used to the battlefield,

Just as their feet were used to the pulpits.8

Meanwhile, news reached Muhammad Ibn Bashir al-Hadrami that his son was captured in the outskirts of Ray, so he said, "To Allah do I entrust him; I do not wish that he should be taken as a captive while I survive him."

When al-Husayn ('a) heard him say so, he excused him from his oath of allegiance to him so that he could manage to have his son released. Having heard the Master of Martyrs say so, he now was fired with holy zeal for the creed and was prompted by his sincere loyalty to demonstrate his firm conviction in sacrificing everything he had to defend the Imam, saying, "O Abu 'Abdullah! May the wild beasts feed on me should I ever part with you!"

Firm conviction and obedience to Allah Almighty and to His Messenger (S) raise those who are thereby enabled to attain the zenith of greatness to a level superior even to virtue itself. Had Ibn Bashir's conviction been shaky, he would have seized the opportunity of the permission that he had received from the Imam ('a) to leave as his excuse before the Master, Praise to Him, and before people.

Al-Husayn's martyrdom did not leave its hero any choice except to release the black slave John who belonged to Abu Tharr al-Ghifari so that his modesty might not keep him from fleeing. But the Master of Martyrs, having come to know his persistence and firmness in the face of calamities, wanted by testing him to acquaint those who had surrounded him, as well as the succeeding generations, with his character.

He wanted to highlight the extent of John's stand to defend the *Shari'a* with which those who betrayed it played havoc no matter how serious the danger was and how many the woes. He, therefore, excused John from his covenant, permitting him to to seek his own safety saying, "O John! You have accompanied us for your health's sake; so, do not be afflicted by our own way of life." It was then that John's tears ran down. John feared he would not succeed in earning eternal happiness.

He blended his tears with a statement that has been reverberating to all succeeding generations ever since, acquainting them with success for those who persevere during the time of trials and tribulations. Said he, "Only rest follows fatigue..."

He also said, "Should I during the time of ease eat your food then betray you during the time of hardship? My smell is bad, my descent is lowly, and my colour is black, so do breathe upon me of the breath of Paradise so that my smell will turn good, my descent will become honourable, and my colour will be white!

No, by Allah! I shall never leave you till my blood is mixed with yours."9

Had it not been for such frank statements made by al-Husayn ('a), nobody would have come to know the purity of the conscience of that slave or of his good intentions. His insistence to be killed, even after receiving permission to be released and to part with the group, demonstrates a very firm conviction.

Summary

Safeguarding the Imam ('a) is like safeguarding the Prophet (S), something which reason and the *Shari'a* mandate, something which nobody should abandon or hesitate to safeguard against those who wish to eradicate it. What is obligatory is to sacrifice one's own life for his [Imam's] sake in order to thus remove the aggression against the life of the Imam who is the life of existence and the existence of the cosmos itself.

The Imam ('a) was also required to call others to support and to defend him with the knowledge that whoever responded would be jeopardizing his life, and that there was no choice except to avoid the fatal danger. He, in such case, was obligated not to require anyone to defend him, for it would then be in vain.

Al-Husayn ('a) was familiar with what he was going to endure. "A destiny which cannot be altered, a decree which cannot be reversed," said he to Umm Salamah adding, "If I do not die today, I will tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, then the day after. Do you think that there is anyone who can avoid death? Do you think that you know what I do not?"

He, then, is not required to obligate others to defend him. Yes; any human who is unfamiliar with divine decrees is not exempted from being required to defend the person of the Imam, the *Hujjah*.

Nobody is excused upon seeing how those people besieged a man whom Allah chose as His viceregent in dealing with His servants, how they cut off all supply routes from him and even prohibited him from having access to water, without rising to remove such an oppression or to protect his sacred life.

Allah Almighty does not accept the excuse of one who sees such a situation and is reluctant to support him even when it is quite precarious except when the *Hujjah* of his time grants him permission to part with him and to leave him to face his enemy, since he is fully familiar with the best course; he is informed by the Wise One, the Knowing, the Sublime.

In such a case, neither reason nor the *Shari'a* requires him to stay and to defend him, nor will his parting be regarded as a violation of what the *Shari'a* has decreed. He will then have an excuse when the books of deeds are spread: he was granted permission by the Imam ('a) not to support him.

The Imam himself will not then be jeopardizing his life upon permitting others to abandon him to face his

foes alone and to excuse them from having sworn the oath of allegiance to him; he will not be going beyond the actual facts at all. If one does not see the Imam seeking his help and support, he does not carry any obligation or responsibility.

Contrariwise, if he sees the Imam in such a precarious situation, repeatedly asking for help, it does not befit him to be too reluctant to support him. In such a case, the Imam will be in a very dire need for his help; so, no excuse shall ever be accepted from him on the Day of Judgment.

Abu 'Abdullah ('a) met 'Ubaydullah Ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi at Qasr Muqatil and solicited his support saying, "I advise you that, if you could, you should avoid hearing us crying and mourning our dead, and do not witness our tragedy. Do so, for by Allah, none who hears us mourning our dead without supporting us except that Allah will hurl him headlong into the fire of hell."

This statement supports our rebuttal of the claims of those who heard the Imam pleading for help without helping him. As for one who does not hear such mourning, and he is granted permission to leave, he surely is excused.

Al-Dahhak Ibn 'Abdullah al-Mashriqi, therefore, will have no excuse on the Day of Judgment because he heard al-Husayn ('a) pleading for help, and he saw him greatly outnumbered. He was obligated to support him to the last breath

A man came to al-Husayn ('a) before the battle started and said, "I would like to fight on your side as long as I see others doing so, but if I do not see anyone fighting with you, shall I then be permitted to leave you?"

Al-Husayn ('a) answered him in the affirmative. The man hid his horse in a deserted place upon seeing how al-Husayn's horses were being hamstrung and kept fighting on foot. When al-Husayn ('a) stood alone on the battlefield, al-Dahhak asked him, "Is my term still honoured?" The Imam ('a) said, "Yes; you are free, if you can, to flee for safety."

The man, therefore, took his horse out of its hiding place, rode it and assaulted the foes forcing his way through their ranks. They made way for him, then fifteen men pursued him.

He came to an old dried-up well near the bank of the Euphrates. The chasing party caught up with him. Ayyub Ibn Mashrah al-Khaywani, Kathir Ibn 'Abdullah al-Sha'bi, and Qays Ibn 'Abdullah al-Sa'idi recognized him and said to their brethren, "This is our cousin! We plead to you in the Name of Allah to spare his life." He was spared 10

His being told by al-Husayn ('a) that he was excused will not avail him on the Day of Judgment because Abu 'Abdullah ('a) could not have asked him to stay till he could meet his death, knowing that the man had set his mind, from the beginning, on leaving safely.

The Creator, Praise to Him, will not excuse him on the Day of Gathering because he had heard the Father of the Oppressed ('a) pleading for help, and whoever hears the Imam thus pleading and does not support him will be hurled by Allah into the fire headlong.

- 1. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 1, p. 238. Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil, Vol. 4, p. 24. Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidaya, Vol. 8, p. 178, where the author mentions the Imam's permission to others to desert and his companions' insistence to sacrifice themselves for his sake. Al-Fadl Ibn Shathan al-Naishapuri has mentioned it in his book Ithbat al-Raj'a, relying on the authority of Imam Abu Ja'far, al-Baqir ('a). It is also narrated by Shaikh al-Mufid in his book Al-Irshad, by al-Tabarsi in his books I'lam al-Wara and Rawdat al-Wa'izin, and by al-Khawarizmi who discusses al-Husayn's martyrdom on p. 246, Vol. 1, of his book Maqtal al-Husayn.
- 2. Ibn Qawlawayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, pp. 969-970.
- 3. al-Bukhari, "Kitab al-Anbiya" (book of the prophets), in the chapter titled "The bald and the leprous." Fath al-Bari, Vol. 6, p. 323.
- 4. Such a level of readiness to sacrifice for the son of the Prophet's daughter ('a) reminds me of the excuse produced by Sa'd Ibn Abu Waqqas when the Commander of the Faithful ('a) asked him for his support. As stated on p. 59 (second edition) of the book titled Al–Jamal by Shaikh al–Mufid, his answer was, "I hate to participate in this war and accidentally kill a believer unless you give me a sword that distinguishes a believer from an unbeliever."
- 5. From among Imamite Shi'as, this hadith is narrated by Ibn Qawlawayh on p. 53 of his book Kamil al–Ziyarat, and by the following from among the Sunnis: al–Tirmithi in his book Al–Jami' fi Manaqib al–Husayn, Al–Hakim on p. 177, Vol. 3, of his book Al–Mustadrak, Ibn 'Asakir on p. 314, Vol. 4 of his book Tahthib Tarikh al–Sham, Ibn Hajar on p. 181, Vol. 9, of his book Mujma' al–Zawa'id, Ibn Hajar al–'Asqalani on p. 115 of his book Al–Sawa'iq al–Muhriqa in tradition 23, al–Bukhari in his book Al–Adab al–Mufrad, al–Muttaqi al–Hindi on p. 107, Vol. 7, of his book Kanz al–'Ummal, al–Safuri on p. 478 of his book Nuzhat al–Majalis, and al–Sayyid al–Murtada on p. 157, Vol. 1, of his Amali, majlis 15.
- 6. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 199.
- 7. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 254.
- 8. Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan.
- 9. Ibn Tawus, Al-Luhuf, p. 61 (Saida edition).
- 10. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 255.

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