

# From Medina to Sham: Lady Zaynab's Commitment to Wilayah

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## Abstract

Apart from the theoretical meaning of commitment to *wilayah*, it is reflected in the actions and behaviors of Muslims and believers who are committed to it. The person truly committed to *wilayah* can be only known from his actions; otherwise, commitment to *wilayah* is not achieved through mere claim and knowledge on its importance.

The Battle of Karbala was replete with such commitment to *wilayah* in which Lady Zaynab is the prime example of. This article seeks to elucidate Lady Zaynab's commitment to *wilayah* from Medina to Karbala, and then Sham (Damascus) by her obedience to – and protection and defense of – Imam Husayn.

## Introduction

The Battle of Karbala were the clear manifestations of commitment to *wilayah* by Imam Husayn and his companions. Both the high-ranking ones – such as Abal-Fadl al-Abbas – and the lower ones in social rank fully realized commitment to *wilayah* of Imam Husayn, and hence created matchless and unprecedented scenes.<sup>3</sup> In this arena, everyone did their best to defend his Wali (Imam), albeit a little.

Lady Zaynab was an influential person in the Ashura event. She did not give up defending her *Wali* (Imam) only because God had not made the smaller struggle (*jihad*) compulsory for women. Rather, she defended Imam Husayn in the most critical conditions. That is why she did not stay in Medina to merely watch her Imam's departure for Mecca and Karbala. When her Imam (*Wali*) started his journey, she

decided to accompany him.

It is noteworthy that she did not set out for Karbala empty-handed; rather, she took along all her asset, namely her sons, to tell her Imam (*Wali*) and all Shi'as that in order to defend him, Zaynab as a person committed to *wilayah* is ready to use all her assets so that the Imam will not remain alone.

In other words, next to the absolute obedience to God, the Qur'an orders us to unconditionally obey the Prophet and those in authority, that is, the Infallible Imams:

***“Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. (4:59)”***<sup>4</sup>

Lady Zaynab, who was in the presence of seven Infallibles, was matchless in all aspects of *wilayah*: knowledge of – and unconditional submission to – the Imam, introducing *Wilayah* to others, sacrifice in the way of *Wilayah*, etc. She had witnessed how her mother protected her Imam (*Wali*), telling him, “[O’ *Abal-Hasan!*] *May I become sacrificed for you by protecting you!*”<sup>5</sup>

Lady Zahra finally sacrificed her life in support of Imam Ali, being martyred in the way of *wilayah*. And Lady Zaynab learned commitment to *wilayah* from her mother and showed it beautifully in Karbala.

To introduce *wilayah*, Lady Zaynab refuted accusations against Ahlul Bayt and reminded the people of the Ahlul Bayt’s forgotten rights. In Kufa, she said, “*How do you want to remove the stigma of killing the grandson of the last Prophet—the spring of Prophetic mission—and the chief of youths dwelling in Heaven?*”<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand, she tried to protect the lives of the two *Wali* [Imam Husayn and Imam Sajjad] by any possible means to the extent that she sacrificed her sons’ lives in this way.

On the other hand, in order to prove her commitment to *wilayah*, she did not withhold any measure to defend her Imam and proved this in the journey from Medina to Sham.

This kind of commitment to *wilayah* should be institutionalized in the Islamic society because sometimes those who claim to be committed to it have erred; they were committed to *Wilayah* merely in words, and not in action. They instead left the Imam alone in the society.

The following discussion includes Lady Zaynab’s commitment to *wilayah* of Imam Husayn and Imam Sajjad from Medina to Sham.

## **1. Accompanying the Imam**

When Imam Husayn’s caravan was about to leave Medina, among the people who urged him not to embark on this journey was ibn Abbas. He said, “*If you have to go to Kufa, at least do not take along your household and wives!*” Lady Zaynab said, “*O’ ibn Abbas! Do you suggest our leader’s embarking on this journey alone and leaving us behind? Do we have anybody except him [as our guardian]? Never!*

*We live with him and die with him.*” Upon hearing this, ibn Abbas wept bitterly.<sup>7</sup>

It is worthy of note that since Lady Zaynab knew that her brother (*Wali*) will be left without any companion in Karbala, she took along her sons (Muhammad and ‘Aun ibn ‘Abdullah) to show all people who are committed to *Wilayah* that one should defend his Imam (*Wali*) with all his or her asset.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Dedicated to Wilayah

Shaikh Mufid quoted Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn as saying, *“The night before Ashura, I was in the tent, and my aunt was nursing me. I saw my father entering his tent, and “John,” who had been Abu-Dharr’s servant, and now was my father’s servant and preparing my father’s sword. My father recited these lines of poetry, ‘O’ World! Woe unto you! You that kill many of your friends and seekers in the mornings and evenings...”*<sup>9</sup>

*My father repeated these words twice or three times, and I heard them completely and found out what he meant. I choked back my tears; I knew there was a calamity predestined to happen! My aunt, Lady Zaynab, also heard those words, was moved, rose and went to Imam Husayn barefoot with her skirt dragged on the ground, and told him, “I wish my life came to an end! It is as if today my mother, Lady Fatimah, passed away, my father, Imam Ali, was martyred, and I lost my brother, Imam Hasan! You are the only one remained alive and a shelter for those who have survived!”*

Imam Husayn told Lady Zaynab, *‘O’ my sister! Beware that Satan might take away your patience.*<sup>10</sup>

Imam Husayn’s worry is evident here. His advice indicates that patience should be Divine and cleansed of any impurity.

## 3. Defending the Imam against ‘Umar ibn Sa‘d

When Imam Husayn fell off his horse, *Dhul-Janah*, on the Day of Ashura, and the enemy’s army surrounded him, Lady Zaynab could not tolerate this and did not leave her Imam alone in the battlefield. Although she was also responsible for protecting Imam Sajjad’s life, she came out of tents and ran toward her Imam. When she saw him surrounded by enemies, she told their commander, *‘Umar ibn Sa‘d, ‘Woe unto you! They are killing Aba-‘Abdillah, and you are only watching them?!’* Umar ibn Sa‘d did not answer. Then she called out, *‘Is not there a Muslim among you?’*<sup>11</sup>

Although she knew she could not save her *Wali*, she could verbally inflame their sentiments, but unfortunately it did not work because of their hard-heartedness and *Jahili* rancor.

## 4. Her increasing Kufans’ insights in defence of her Wali

When the Ahlul Bayt’s caravan who was captive arrived in Kufa, the Kufans came to watch them, with a

huge crowd gathered in the main square. Lady Zaynab took the opportunity and began to defend the Ahlul Bayt. According to historians, Lady Zaynab spoke eloquently with complete modesty, as if it was Imam Ali speaking.

There was pin-drop silence as she spoke: *“Praise be to Allah and peace be upon my grandfather, Prophet Muhammad! O’ Kufans! O’ Deceivers! I hope you will never stop shedding tears and groaning. You resemble a woman who unravels her strongly spun thread; you have made your promises a means of deception. Have you ever demonstrated anything except self-praise, deception, and rancor? You appear pathetic and heartsick. You are weak when faced with enemies and break your promises. Know that you have sent bad provisions for your hereafter. You will face God’s wrath and be punished eternally in Hell.”*

She continued, *“Do you cry? Yes, by God, you deserve this, and you should weep a lot and laugh a little. You have chosen disgrace, and this stigma will be never removed. You have killed Husayn, who was the Prophet’s grandson, the chief of youths in Heaven, the shelter for the righteous, sympathetic to the afflicted, and your guide. What a heinous sin you have committed! May you be permanently excluded from God’s mercy and be disappointed!”*<sup>12</sup>

According to the historians, her sermon reminded the people of Imam Ali’s sermons for Kufans, and they remembered her father’s government. The sermon delivered in defence of *Wilayah* is priceless.

## **5. Defense of – and obedience to –the Imam in Ibn Ziyad’s gathering**

When the Ahlul Bayt’s caravan reached Kufa, Ibn Ziyad held a public gathering, with the holy head of Imam Husayn in front of him and his household taken there.

Lady Zaynab came in unknown and sat down ignoring Ibn Ziyad, who asked, *“Who’s this?”* They said, *“She is Ali’s daughter.”* Ibn Ziyad told her, *“Praise be to God, who dishonored you and foiled your plot?”*

Lady Zaynab said, *“Verily, the evil-doer is dishonored, and the sinner is refuted, and we are not either.”*

Ibn Ziyad said, *“How do you view the way God treated your brother and household?”*

Lady Zaynab responded, *“I did not see it but favorable treatment. They [Husayn and his companions] were a group for whom God had ordained martyrdom, and they rushed to the place of their martyrdom. In the near future, God will gather you and them, and then you will be argued against and will see who is triumphant. May your mother mourn for you, O’ Ibn Marjanah!”*

Ibn Ziyad got angry and intended to kill Lady Zaynab. A man named ‘Amro ibn Harith said, *“O’ Emir! Women should not be rebuked for their words.”*

Ibn Ziyad said, *“Verily, by killing your rebellious brother and dissidents from your household, God healed my heart.”*

Lady Zaynab said, *“You have killed my chief, cut my branches, and uprooted me. If this is your healing, so you have been healed.”*

Ibn Ziyad said, *“She speaks in prose; I swear that your father was also a poet.”*

Lady Zaynab replied, *“O’ ibn Ziyad! A woman does not have anything to do with prose!”*

Then ibn Ziyad turned to Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn and said, *“Who’s this?”*

He was told, *“Ali ibn al-Husayn.”*

Ibn Ziyad said, *“Wasn’t Ali ibn al-Husayn killed by God?”*

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin said, *“I have a brother named liked me—Ali ibn al-Husayn—who was killed by the people.”*

Ibn Ziyad said, *“No, God killed him.”*

Imam Sajjad said, ***“Allah takes the souls at the time of their death. (39:42)”***[13](#)

Ibn Ziyad said, *“How dare you respond to me! Behead him.”*

Hearing these evil words, Lady Zaynab said, *“Ibn Ziyad! You have killed all of us. If you intend to kill him, you should kill me, too.”*

Imam Sajjad told his aunt, *“My dear aunt! Let me talk to him.”*[14](#)

Then the 4th Imam told ibn Ziyad, *“Do you threaten to kill me? Don’t you know it is our routine to be killed, and martyrdom is our honor.”*[15](#)

There in the enemy’s palace where everything was ready for the enemy, she carried out her mission, defending her two Imams (*Walīs*). She did not fear what might happen in ibn Ziyad’s palace, revolting against and dishonoring him.

## **6. Defending wilayah and Imamate in Yazid’s gathering**

After the Ahlul Bayt’s caravan had been taken to Sham, Yazid held a gathering and invited foreign ambassadors and guests.

There Lady Zaynab stood up and told Yazid,

*“All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds! Allah’s peace and blessings be upon Muhammad and*

his household! God said truthfully,

**'Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them (30: 10).'** [16](#)

O' Yazid! Do you assume now that you have surrounded us and we have been drifted away like slave-girls, this dishonors us and dignifies you?! Do you think this indicates your greatness and as a result you have become over-proud and your eyes shine with joy? Now that you see this world and our kingdom belonging to you, you should not relax for a moment. Do you forget God's word that,

**'Let the faithless not suppose that the respite that We grant them is good for their souls: We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and there is a humiliating punishment for them.'** (3: 178) [17](#)

She added, "O' the son of freed slaves! Is it fair that your women and slave-girls are behind curtains [covered and with Hijab] and Prophet Muhammad's daughters are captive?! You have uncovered them and lifted their veils. You have made them—like enemies—migrate from one city to another. Everybody in this city and people from faraway lands saw them and their faces while none of their men were supporting and accompanying them."

She continued, "What should be expected from the son of the one who ate the liver of the righteous and his flesh grew out of martyrs' blood [except this]? And how can the one who is our malicious enemy not be hostile to us? Then without feeling guilty, you say that [your ancestors] should come back to life and celebrate this, telling you: well done Yazid! While you are hitting Abi-'Abdillah's teeth with your whip and stick."

She further said, "Now that through wounding us, you are delighted, and by killing the Prophet's offspring— who are stars of the earth and descendants of Abdul- Muḥalib—have made his household desperate, then call your ancestor, why do you not say this?"

"[O Yazid!] Very soon you will join them, and then you will wish you were lame and dumb so that you did not say such things and you did not take such actions."

"O God! Uphold our rights, revenge on those who oppressed us, and have wrath on those who killed our men and supporters."

"[O Yazid!] By God, you have punctured your own skin and cut your own flesh. No doubt, you will be taken to the Prophet [on the Day of Judgement] while you spilled his offspring's blood and disrespected them. Then God will change our disunity to unity, alleviate our distress, and uphold our rights. **"Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of Allah to be dead; rather they are living and provided for near their Lord. (3: 169)"** [18](#)

# Lady Zaynab's commitment to wilayah since the beginning of Ali ibn al-Husayn's Imamate

## 1. Obeying the Imam in the most difficult conditions

Lady Zaynab was wholeheartedly obedient to the Imamate during both Imam Husayn and Imam Sajjad's Imamate. Even when the enemies set fire to their tents, that is, at the beginning of the 4th Imam's Imamate, she came to him and said, *"O' the only survivor! They set fire to the tents; what should we do?"*

The Imam said, *"You must escape."*<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Protecting the Imam's life on the day of Ashura

On several occasions, Lady Zaynab supported Imam Sajjad, taking her life in her hands.

A. On the Day of Ashura, when Imam Husayn asked for help as an ultimatum, his sick son—Imam Sajjad—went to the battlefield. Lady Zaynab rushed to stop him. Imam Husayn also told him, *"Have him return; if he is killed, there will be no descendant of Prophet Muhammad on the earth."*<sup>20</sup>

B. The night after Ashura, when enemies attacked the Ahlul Bayt's tents, Shimr decided to kill Imam Sajjad, but Lady Zaynab shouted, *"As long as I am alive, I will not allow his life to be at risk. If you want to kill him, you must kill me at first."*<sup>21</sup>

C. When Lady Zaynab found Imam Sajjad impatient, seeing martyrs of Karbala, she told him, *"O' the descendant of my grandfather, father, and brother! Why do you do so with yourself? By God, this is the covenant that your grandfather and father made with God. God has made a covenant with the people who are unknown to the earth's pharaohs but known to the dwellers of heavens to gather and bury these punctured and bloody bodies. In this plain, a monument will be built on Imam Husayn's grave which will not disappear with the passage of time. No matter how hard disbelievers and misguided people will try to destroy it, it will become more renowned."*<sup>22</sup>

## 3. The devotee of wilayah

After the argument between Imam Sajjad and ibn Ziyad, the cursed ibn Ziyad decided to kill the Imam. When Lady Zaynab found out about this, she hugged the Imam and shouted, *"O' Ibn Ziyad! Leave us alone! Have you not shed our blood enough? Have you left anybody from among us alive?"* The she added, *"If you are going to kill him, you should kill me with him, too."* Upon hearing this, Imam Sajjad shouted, *"O' Ibn Ziyad! If there is kinship between you and these women, have a pious man accompany them."*

Ibn Ziyad looked at them and told his men, *“How come there is kinship?! By God, He likes her to be killed with him. Let this young man accompany the women.”*<sup>23</sup>

Of course, Ibn Ziyad could not understand this support was not merely because of kinship ties, but rather in defence of *Wilayah* and Imamate. If this were the issue of kinship ties, Lady Zaynab would protect her sons' live and would not send them to the battlefield.

## Conclusion

Commitment to *wilayah* is not evaluated by words. There may be many people who prove it through giving the most convincing reasons and present it to people very beautifully; thus, obtaining a political and social position.

However, in reality, commitment to *wilayah* is manifested in action. There may be people who cannot give any reason for their commitment to *wilayah*, but in practice because they know their Imam (Wali), they do not regard their knowledge as important when it is juxtaposed with the Imam's view. Obeying the Imam and following his ideas, they are ready to sacrifice their lives and asset.

In this respect, Lady Zaynab is the role model for all people who are committed to Wilayah. She sacrificed all her asset, that is, her sons, for her Imam (Wali) in Karbala and she was herself hurt a lot in this path. There is no report indicating her dissatisfaction with *wilayah* and commitment to it. When Ibn Ziyad tried to reprimand her, she said, *“I did not see it but favorable treatment.”*<sup>24</sup>

Thus, we should follow in her footsteps in commitment to *wilayah* and be self-sacrificing like her, and praise be to God, such committed people are not few in our Islamic society today.

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3. The nights before military operations in the eight-year Sacred Defence of Iran resemble to Ashura a lot, and their common point is to obey Imam (Wali)'s orders.

4. Nisa, 59. أَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

5. Majlisi, 1364 solar, vo. 19, p.81. روحى لروحك الفداء ونفسي لنفسيك الوفاء

6. Tabarsi, 1403 A.H., vol. 2, 304. إني ترحضون قتل سليل خاتم النبوه ومعدن الرساله وسيد شباب أهل الجنة

7. Ha'eri, 1400 A.H., vol.1, p. 247.

8. Mamaqani, 1350 solar, vol. 2, p.173.

9. يا دهر أف لك من خليل

كم لك با لاشراق والاصيل

من صاحب أو طالب قتيل

10. Majlisi, 1364 solar, 250. يا اخته لا يذهبن حلمك الشيطان

11. Mufid, 212:2. ويحك يا عمر ايقتل أبو أهد الله وانت تنظر إليه فلم يجيها عمر بشيء فنادت ويحك أما فيكم مسلم؟

12. Qummi, 1412 A.H., p.358.

13. Zumar, 42. "اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا"

14. Tabari, 1375 solar, vol.5, p. 457.

15. Majlisi, 1364 solar, vol.45, p.118.

16. Rum, 10. الحمد لله الرب العالمين وصلي الله محمد واله أجمعين، صدق الله كذلك يقول "ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا السُّوأى أَن كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ" "وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِؤُونَ"

17. Ale-Imran, 178. وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا ۗ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

- [18.](#) ibn Tawoos, 1348 A. H., p. 191. Ale-Imran, 169. وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتًا ۖ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ
- [19.](#) Majlisi, 111:45. عليكن بالفرار
- [20.](#) Majlisi, 1364 solar, vol.45, p.46
- [21.](#) ibid.
- [22.](#) Ibn Qulaweih, 1356 solar, p.295.
- [23.](#) Tabari, 1357 solar, vol.5, p.457.
- [24.](#) Karami, 1380 solar, p.304. ما رايت إلا جميلا

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