

Rendezvous with Fate – Karbala

When Zaynab [a.s.] learnt of her brother's proposed journey to Kufa she begged her husband to give her leave to accompany her brother. Abdullah pointed out that such a journey was fraught with difficulties and hardship. Zaynab [a.s.] insisted, saying, "My mother did not leave me behind to watch from afar as recreation the day when my brother is all alone, surrounded by enemies with no friend or supporter.

You know that for fifty-five years my brother and I have never been separated. Now is the time of our old age and the closing period of our lives. If I leave him now, how shall I be able to face my mother, who at the time of her death had willed, 'Zaynab, after me you are both mother and sister for Husayn [a.s.]'? It is obligatory for me to stay with you, but if I do not go with him at this time, I shall not be able to bear the separation." Abdullah himself had wanted to accompany the Imam, but since he had been weakened by illness, he gave her permission to go on this destined journey. With her he sent two of their sons. Zaynab [a.s.] had been prepared all her life for what was written for her and her brother. She preferred to face the trials of Karbala than to ever be separated from him.

Having decided to leave, Imam Husayn [a.s.] ordered that litters be prepared for the ladies of his family. Abu'l-Fadl Abbas, his half-brother (for they shared the same father), helped Zaynab [a.s.] and her sister Umm Kulthum into their litter. They were followed by two young girls, Fatima Kubra and Sakina, daughters of Imam Husayn [a.s.].

After the first day of their journey, the party camped at Khuzaymiyyah for the night. While Zaynab [a.s.] was seeing to her brother's comfort, he said to her, "What will come to pass has long since been decreed."

When later on their journey, they reached Ruhayma, they found their way blocked by Hur ibn Yazid Riyahi. Sakina saw what had happened and when she told Zaynab [a.s.], Zaynab wept and said to her, "Would that the enemy killed all of us rather than slay my brother."

When Imam Husayn [a.s.] heard of his sister's distress, he went to her tent and she said to him, "O my brother, talk to them. Tell them about your nearness to the Holy Prophet and of your kinship with him." Imam Husayn [a.s.] replied, "O sister! I spoke to them at length. I tried to convince them but they are so

immersed in misguidance and obsessed with greed that they cannot set aside their evil intentions. They will not rest till they have killed me and seen me rolling around in my blood. O sister, I advise you to patiently endure the forthcoming troubles. My grandfather the Holy Prophet had told me of my martyrdom, and his foretellings cannot be untrue."

Imam Husayn's [a.s.] party reached Karbala on the second of Muharram. But the supporters that had originally invited him to Kufa were no longer his to command. Having got wind of their intentions, Yazid appointed Ibn Ziyad, governor of Kufa, to carry out orders to subvert their plans, and this they had achieved successfully. With the Imam's following cunningly eliminated, forces were sent to meet him near Karbala.

The tents were pitched and at night Imam Husayn [a.s.] sat cleaning his sword and reciting couplets forecasting his doom. His son Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.] listened quietly but in sorrow. When Zaynab [a.s.] heard him she could not restrain her tears. She went to her brother and prayed that death would overtake her. Imam Husayn [a.s.] urged her not to let Shaytan deprive her of her power of fortitude. She asked whether she might be killed in his place, and when she heard his negative reply she fainted. When she came to, her brother said, "Everything is mortal. The final word lies with Allah and to Him is the return. My father and grandfather were better men than I but where are they now? Their example is the standard for me and for all Muslims."

So saying he bade her be patient and not to weep over his death or shed tears or beat her cheeks. He then took her to the tent of his son Ali Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.] and left her there. But Zaynab [a.s.] was not to be consoled, and from this time came to be known as Baakiyah (one who weeps).

On the eve of the tenth day of Muharram, Imam Husayn [a.s.] addressed his followers, the Ansar and the Bani Hashim. It had become clear that this was to be a battle unto death. He therefore released them from any obligation to remain by his side, and let them know that no grudge would be held against them were they to turn away from the coming decisive battle and return to safety.

There was now no doubt about the slaughter that was to come. Despite the heavy burden of knowing this insurmountable fact, Zaynab [a.s.] maintained her tranquility through constant prayer and remembrance of the ultimate cause for which their lives were being sacrificed.

On the insistence of Shimr, Umar ibn Sa'd prepared to attack Imam Husayn's dwindled forces.

When Zaynab [a.s.] heard the battle-cries of their approaching troops she ran to her brother's tent and found that he had fallen asleep while cleaning his sword. She stood there quietly for a moment. He woke up, and seeing her said that he had just had a dream in which he saw his grandfather, the Holy Prophet [s.a.w.], his father Ali [a.s.], his mother Fatima [a.s.], and his brother Hasan [a.s.] telling him that he would soon join them. Seeing how distressed Zaynab [a.s.] was on hearing these words, he said to her, "The blessings of Allah are upon you. Do not worry about the troubles these wretched people will cause."

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