

The Third Journey – Karbala' to Kufa

Dawn breaks out on the desolate sands of Karbala'. What was the battle field yesterday, is a stretch of desert covered with the bodies of the slain. In the corner where there had stood Imam Husayn's camp the mourning widows and orphans have completed their morning prayers.

Imam Zain ul 'Abideen is in sijdah glorifying Allah. Umar Sa'ad walks over with a few soldiers and orders the women and the children to be tied with ropes as captives. There is a renewed wailing. Our fourth Imam consoles them. He himself is put under heavy chains. Yazid's soldiers spend the day burying their dead. The bodies of the grandson of the Prophet of Islam and the other martyrs are left unattended. Imam Zain ul 'Abideen pleads to be allowed to bury but all his pleas go unheeded.

Another night in Karbala' followed by another dawn! The prisoners remain tied. Our Imam suffers the discomfort of the chain. His wrists and ankles are bruised. On the morning of the 12th Muharram the enemy brings unsaddled camels upon which the women and children are made to mount. A huge procession is being prepared.

At the head of the procession is Umar Sa'ad followed by the officers. Then a few foot soldiers carrying lances upon which are mounted the heads of the martyrs. In their midst is our fourth Imam, chained and shackled. Then the camels carrying the women and children as prisoners. Shimr and the rest of the infantry bring up the rear. The journey to Kufa begins.

Yes, the tale of Karbala' is a tale of five sad journeys! Now begins the third journey of tears. We look at the travellers. Some of those who had set out on that first journey, from Mecca to Madina, can be seen but the rest can not. No! They also can be seen if we look around! They are lying slaughtered on the sands of Karbala'.

Who is the hero and who is the heroine of this third journey? We see the hero, hand-cuffed, chained, exhausted with the long illness and the great suffering, our Fourth Imam, Zain ul 'Abideen. And the heroine? Yes we see the lady. She is bare-headed. Her face full of pain and yet reflecting courage and the strength of her spirit! She knows that for the sake of Bibi Sakina and the other ladies she can not possibly give in to her grief and sorrow. Yes, it is Bibi Zainab!

Umar Sa'ad cruelty is not exhausted. He decides to lead the procession past where the bodies of the martyrs lie. As the camel carrying Bibi Zainab goes past the body of Imam Husayn she can no longer contain her pain and anguish, and turning her face to Madina she cries out: "Ya Muhammad, The angels in heaven send their blessings upon you! Look, here lies your beloved Husayn, so humiliated and disgraced, covered with blood and cut into pieces. Here are we your daughters taken captives by Yazid!"

Imam Zain ul 'Abideen walks over to Bibi Zainab." Dear Aunt, have patience. Your sacrifices for Islam have only just begun."

Ibn Ziyad, the Governor of Kufa, had declared a holiday. The city was decorated with flags and pennants. People had been told that the rebels who wanted to attack their city and murder them had been defeated at Karbala' and that their women were being brought into the city as prisoners. Those who believed this, and many did, came out to line the city streets through which the procession was to pass so that they might mock and jeer at the prisoners.

Big crowds had gathered everywhere. There was a holiday mood. The procession slowly entered the city and began to move towards the Governor's palace. People jeered and shouted at the prisoners. There were a few, however, who guessed the truth. When they saw Imam Husayn's head, and saw the misery and grief of the widows and orphans, they began to shed tears. The majority were ignorant. They believed, or found it convenient to believe, the lies which Umar Sa'ad had told them.

As the procession neared the palace, the crowds thickened. Most of the people who gathered around the Governor's palace were those who worked for Yazid or supported him. The jeering and insults grew louder. The face of Bibi Zainab was red with anger. She stood up on the camel, looked at the crowd and in a loud and clear voice said: "Praise be to Allah and blessings upon my grandfather Muhammad, His beloved Prophet!! Woe unto you, O people of Kufa! Do you know whom you have killed? Do you know what pledge you have broken? Do you know whose blood you have shed? Do you know whose honour you have defiled?"

There was a stunned silence. Then a gentle sound of people crying! There was a blind old man in the crowd. He had been a companion of Hazrat Ali. When he heard Bibi Zainab's voice, he cried out, "By Allah, if I had not known that he had died, I could have sworn that what I just heard was the voice of my master Ali ibn Abu Taalib." Imam Zain ul 'Abideen went up to him and said, "Oh Shaikh! This is not Ali but his daughter Zainab binti Ali! She is the daughter of Fatimah, the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet."The sound of weeping from the crowd grew louder. But as Bibi Zainab continued. Immediately there was a hushed silence:

"And well may you weep, O people of Kufa! The crime which you committed against your Prophet was so great that the skies shook, the earth trembled, and mountains crumbled down! You have killed your Imam, and by doing so lost your shelter against hardship, evil and kufr! His blood stains your souls. Nothing can protect you from the anger of Allah for having killed the son of the last of His prophets!"

People could no longer control their wailing. Umar Sa'ad was frightened and quickly led the prisoners into the palace. The prisoners were brought before ibn Ziyad. Shaikh al-Mufid (A.R.) reports that ibn Ziyad sat on his throne and in front of him was the head of Imam Husayn. He frequently poked the face with his cane. An old companion of the Holy Prophet, Zayd bin Arqam, was in the court and when he witnessed this indignity being inflicted on the head of Imam he cried out, "Take your cane away from those lips! By Allah I have seen the lips of the Apostle of Allah on those lips!"

Ibn Ziyad was livid with rage. He retorted, "O old man! How dare you interrupt our celebrations of the victory of our Imam, Yazid ibn Muawiyah. Because of your age I spare your life. Leave my court immediately."

Ibn Ziyad then pointed at Imam Zain ul 'Abideen and asked: "Who is this young man?" "He is Ali ibn al Husayn," replied Umar Sa'ad." "Why is he alive?" asked ibn Ziyad. and added, "Kill him straight away!"

Bibi Zainab rushed forward and planted herself in front of Imam Zain ul 'Abideen."You will have to kill me first!" She said looking at ibn Ziyad with such defiance, determination and anger that ibn Ziyad got up and walked away ordering that the prisoners be locked up.

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