

Sacrifice – Karbala

The tenth day of Muharram, 'Ashura, dawned. Before going into battle Imam Husayn [a.s.] went into the tent of his son Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.] who was lying ill on a sheep's skin, too weak to join his father in battle. He was being tended to by his aunt Zaynab [a.s.]. Husayn [a.s.] bade him farewell, saying, "My son, you are the best and purest of my children. After me you will be my successor and deputy. Take care of these women and children during captivity and the rigours of travel. Console them. My son, convey to my friends my Salam (greetings of peace) and tell them their Imam has been killed away from his home and that they should mourn for me."

Sighing deeply, he turned to Zaynab [a.s.] and the other women of the Bani Hashim and said, "Take heed and remember that this my son is my successor and Imam and is to be obeyed by everyone." Then to Zaynab [a.s.] he said, "After killing me my enemies would take off the clothes from my body. Therefore please bring me some old and tattered dress to wear so that they might not undress me and leave me naked." Zaynab [a.s.] did as he requested.

That same day, Zaynab [a.s.] brought to him her two sons Aun and Mohammed and said to him, "O my brother, if women were permitted to fight I would have courted death to save you. But it is not allowed. Accept therefore the sacrifice of my two sons."

The bloody battle raged all day. One by one Imam Husayn's sons, kinsmen and supporters were butchered on the battlefield. When Zaynab's sons were killed she bore their death with fortitude.

She did not come out of her tent, nor did she loudly lament for she did not wish to cause grief or shame to her brother. But when the corpse of Ali Akbar [a.s.] (the son of Imam Husayn [a.s.]) was brought to the tents of the women Zaynab [a.s.] was distraught. Oblivious of her veil she came out of her tent and clasped the body saying, "O my son, would that I had become blind, or had been buried beneath the ground so as not to have seen this day."

Their enemies did not even give them access to any water that might soothe their parched throats. Their water supplies had long since been finished. When the Imam was taking his final leave of the ladies, Zaynab [a.s.] asked that he try to get a little water for his dehydrated infant son Ali Asghar [a.s.].

The Imam took him in his arms and went to beseech Umar ibn Sa'd for water for the innocent child. But his request fell on deaf ears and stone hearts. Instead, an arrow pierced the child's neck, killing him instantly. Imam Husayn [a.s.] returned with the child still in his arms, himself spattered with his son's blood. Zaynab [a.s.] took the small corpse from her brother and pressing it close to her chest lamented pitifully the heavy toll on life that the injustices of the enemy extracted.

The fateful day wore on. Husayn [a.s.] was wounded so many times until eventually he fell off his horse. His enemies surrounded him and attacked him with swords and spears. When Zaynab [a.s.] saw his agony from her tent door she went on to the field of battle and approaching the Imam, she said, "O my brother, my master, would that the sky fell down on the earth and the mountains toppled to the ground."

Then she turned to Umar ibn Sa'd and said, "O Sa'd, Husayn is being butchered and you are only watching." Hearing this his eyes filled with tears, but he made no reply.

Then Zaynab addressed the others of the army: "Is there no Muslim among you who could help the grandson of the Prophet of Allah?" And then the fighting came to an end. Seventy-three brave men had faced four thousand, and after the bloody encounter was over none of the Imam's supporters were left alive. The Imam's body was trampled by his enemies' horses, his head was severed, and even the tattered cloth with which he had hoped to preserve his modesty was snatched off him.

At the moment of the Imam's death, Hadrat Jibra'il proclaimed: "Beware, Husayn has been murdered in Karbala."

Upon hearing this Zaynab [a.s.] rushed to Imam Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.] and told him about the tragedy that had just occurred. At his asking she raised the curtain of the tent door for him and looking towards the battlefield, he exclaimed: "My Aunt, my father has been killed, and with him the spring of generosity and honour too has come to an end. Inform the women and ask them to conduct themselves with patience and forbearance; let them be prepared to be plundered and taken captive."

Now the enemy came to the women's tents. Umar ibn Sa'd gave the order to loot.

Barging in, they plundered what they could and set the tents on fire. They beat the women with their swords and snatched away their veils. Imam Zayn ul-Abidin's bedding was ripped from beneath him and he was left lying feeble, weak and unable to move. Both Sakina's and Fatima's earrings were wrenched from their ears, making them bleed.

While the tents burned away Zaynab [a.s.] gathered the young women and went to find Imam Ali Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.]. Finding that he had not been killed, Shimr had come to behead him. Zaynab [a.s.] threw herself on her sick nephew to protect him and Shimr was stopped from carrying out his evil intention.

Most of the women and the children had fled into the open in terror. As night fell Zaynab [a.s.] collected them all together, but could not find Sakina, daughter of Husayn [a.s.]. She was greatly perturbed and

called on her dead brother to tell her where the girl was. A voice replied, "O my sister, my daughter is with me." Sakina had slipped away to where the body of her dead father lay. Zaynab [a.s.] found her there clinging to his body and brought the orphaned child back.

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