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The Sermon of Imam Zayn Al-Abidin

Introduction

The historical narrations that have reached to us are somewhat ambiguous as far as the timeline of the sermon of Imam Zayn Al-Abidin is concerned. However, by looking at the circumstances and the impact of Lady Zaynab's sermon on the audience, it would not be difficult to surmise that Yazid asked one of his orators to get on the pulpit in order to tarnish the image of Imam 'Ali in general and that of Imam Husayn in particular. This was Yazid's way of damage control for the impact of Zaynab's sermon.

As someone in the pay of the imperial court, the orator went on the pulpit and fulfilled his master's wishes by talking ill about Imam 'Ali and highly praising Mu'awiyah and Yazid.

When Imam Zayn Al-Abidin heard it, he shouted at him: *"O the speaker! You have bought the pleasure of a created being by displeasing the Creator, and so have reserved a seat for yourself in the Hell-fire."*

Then the Imam turned to Yazid and said, *"O Yazid, allow me to get on this 'piece of wood' and say something that would please Allah and be a cause of His blessings for the audience."* Yazid refused.

(Comment: It is interesting to see the Imam describing the pulpit as "piece of wood" and not a "*mimbar* – pulpit" – a seat used for uttering words that would displease Allah is not worthy of being called "*mimbar*.")

The people started insisting, *"O the leader, let him go on the pulpit so that we can hear what he has to say."* Yazid replied, *"If he goes on the pulpit, he will not get down until he has humiliated me and the family of Abu Sufyan."*

The people said, *"What can this person say?"* They were looking at his young age and his status as a prisoner.

Yazid responded, *"He is member of a family who is steeped in knowledge."* The people's insistence increased until he had to give in.

Imam Zayn Al-Abidin got on the pulpit and gave a sermon in which he focused on the family of Imam 'Ali and the Prophet.

1) The Preamble

All praise is due to Allah who has no beginning, and the Eternal who has no end, the one who is the First but not in the sense of numbers and the Last but in the sense of ending, and the one who will last after everything perishes. He created nights and days, and distributed sustenance among the people. So blessed is Allah, the King, the All-Knowing.

2) The Status of Prophet's Family

O people! We [*the family of the Prophet*] *have been blessed with six* [*qualities*] *and have been preferred* [*over others*] *by seven* [*individuals*]*:*

We have been blessed with [*1*] *knowledge,* [*2*] *forbearance,* [*3*] *generosity,* [*4*] *eloquence,* [*5*] *courage and* [*6*] *love in hearts of the believers.*

We have been preferred [*over others*] *through*
[*1*] *the Chosen Prophet, Muhammad who is from us,*
[*2*] *the truthful one* [*i.e., 'Ali*] *who is from us,*
[*3*] *the one who flies* [*in heaven, Ja'far*] *is from us,*
[*4*] *the lion of God and the Prophet* [*Hamzah*] *is from us,*
[*5*] *the chief of the women of the worlds, the pure Fatimah, is from us, and*
[*6-7*] *the Prophet's two grandsons in this community* [*Hasan* & *Husayn*] *are from us.*

"Who am I?"

Whoever knows me knows me; but one who does not know me, I shall inform him of my status and noble descent.

[Who is my great-grandfather?]

I am the son of Mecca and Mina, I am the son of Zamzam and Safa.[1]

I am son of he who raised the Black Stone in his robe, I am the son of the best one who put on the shirt and robe, I am the son of the best one who put on the shoes and walked, I am the son of the best one who did the circumambulation (*tawaf*) *and sa'i, I am the son of the best one who did the pilgrimage and responded to Allah's call, I am the son of the one who was carried on the Buraq on the air, I am the son of one who was taken in the night journey from Masjidul Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa,*[2] *I am the son of the one who reached with Jibra'il* [*in his ascension*] *to the sidratul muntaha* (*the holiest spot in heaven*),[3] *I*

am the son of the one who reached very close to that holy spot, I am the son of the one who prayed with the angels two cycles, I am the son of the one to whom God sent revelation. [*In short,*] *I am the son of Muhammad al-Mu tafa.*

[Who is my grandfather?]

I am the son of 'Ali al-Murtaza, I am son of the one who subdued the people till they said: la ilaha illal lah, I am the son of the one who fought in defense of the Prophet with two swords and two spears, did two migrations[4] *pledged allegiance to the Prophet twice,*[5] *prayed towards two qiblahs, courageously fought in Badr and Hunayn, and never ever disbelieved in Allah!*

I am the son of 'the righteous one among the believers,'[6] *the successor of the prophets, destroyer of the disbelievers, leader of the Muslims, light of the mujahidin, prince of the worshippers, 'crown' of those who cry* [*in their prayers*]*, the most patient of those who exercise patience, the best among those who stand for prayer from the family of Taha and Yasin, the Messenger of the Lord of the universe.*

I am the son of the one who was supported by Jibra'il and Mika'il, I am the son of the one who protected the sanctities of the Muslims, who fought the rebels, the deviants, and the violators, and who confronted his hateful enemies.

I am the son of the one who is most honourable among the Quraysh, and the first among believers to respond to Allah and His Messenger, the first among the foremost ones, the one who crushed the back of the rebels and destroyed the idol-worshippers; the one who was an arrow from the arrows of Allah against the hypocrites; the tongue of the wisdom of the worshippers, the helper of Allah's religion, the friend of Allah, the garden of Allah's wisdom, the vessel of Allah's knowledge... the father of the two grandsons of the Prophet, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, demonstrator of the extra-ordinary feats, destroyers of the divisions, the shooting star, the lasting light, the victorious lion of Allah – that is my grandfather, 'Ali bin Abi Talib.

[Who is my great-grandmother?]

I am the son of Fatimatu 'z-Zahra', I am the son of the chief of the women, I am the son of the pure Batul, I am the son of 'the part of the Messenger;' and I am the son of Khadijatu 'l-Kubra.

[Who is my father?]

I am the son of the person killed unjustly, the son of one whose head was severed from the back of the neck, I am the son of the one who was thirsty till the last moment, I am the son of one who was abandoned in Karbala, I am the son of the one whose blood soaked in the dust – I am the son of the one who was slaughtered in Karbala.

I am the son of the one on whom the angels of the heavens cried, I am the son of the one on whom the

jinn in the earth and birds in the sky wailed. I am the son of the one whose head was paraded on the spear; I am the son of the one whose family was made prisoners from Iraq to Sham.

According to the narrations, Imam Zayn Al-Abidin continued to say "I am..." and "I am..." until the people started to cry and Yazid feared their reaction. Then Yazid asked the *mu'adhdhin* to sound the call for prayer so that the Imam would be forced to stop his speech.

The *mu'adhdhin* started the call for prayer. He said, "*Allahu akbar* – Allah is the greatest," and the Imam affirmed the greatness of Allah. Then the *mu'adhdhin* said, "*Ash-hadu an la ilaha il-lal-lah* – I bear witness that there is no god but Allah," and the Imam affirmed the unity of God.

When the *mu'adhdhin* uttered the third phrase of the adhan, "*ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu 'l-lah* – I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah," the Imam turned towards Yazid and said:

O Yazid! This Muhammad is my grandfather or your grandfather? If you say that he is your grandfather, then you are a liar and you will become kafir; and if you say that he is my grandfather, then why did you kill his family? Why did you kill my father and made his women captives?

Yazid ordered the *mu'adhdhin* to start the *iqamah* to start the prayer. Imam Zayn Al-Abidin's speech had such an impact that many people stood up and left without praying behind Yazid.

1. The Imam symbolically relates himself to the holy places of Islam.
2. "Buraq" refers to the mount used for taking the Prophet to his ascension from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to the heavens.
3. Refers to 53:14
4. Could refer to the Shi'b Abi Talib and Medina or to Medina and Kufa.
5. In the pledge of al-'Aqaba and the pledge of Ri wan in Hudaybiyya.
6. Refers to 66:4.

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