

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

We still have plenty of extracts to share with you all about what the Promised Messiah (as) has written about Islam. But since we have already entered into the New Islamic year 1440 AH as from Tuesday last, we will be talking about the main event that has marked the history of Islam in the month of Muharram, namely the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussein (ra) at Karbala. Several times in the past we have spoken about these matters but we need to remind ourselves and our future generations of how some Muslims who exercise power can at times commit extreme atrocities in order to maintain their power and not allow anyone to threaten their status. At the same time, we need to remind ourselves how the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) displayed exemplary courage to fight injustice, to fight for what was right and how he did not bow his head to Yazid, the caliph of the time, because he knew that Yazid was unfit to be a caliph.

I will tell you about their martyrdom as it is recorded in Al Suyuti's book "*Tarikh al Khulafa*" which means the history of the caliphs. I will quote mostly from this book because Imam Suyuti is considered a great scholar in Islam. We are in the year 680AD and it is about 50 years since the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) passed away. Imam Hussein (ra) who was born in the year 6AH was only about 6 years old when the Holy Prophet (saw) passed away. In 680AD he was around 55 years old. Muawiya had nominated his son Yazid to succeed him after his death. Now I will continue with what Imam Suyuti said about this matter:

"Ibn Sirin states that A'mr-b-Hazm went to Mu'awiya and said to him, " I call the Lord to thy remembrance in regard to the people of Muhammad, concerning him whom thou placest as thy successor over them." He replied, "thou, hast given me counsel and spoken according to thy judgment, but verily there remain none but my son and their sons, and my son is the most deserving.

"Attia-b-Kays says that Mu'awiyah preached and said, " O Lord, if I have surely made a covenant for Yazid on account of the merit I saw in him, then cause him to arrive at that which I have hoped, and assist him, but if it was indeed the love of the father for his son that hath influenced me, and if he be

not deserving of that which I have done for him, then take him away before he arrives at it." And when Mu'awiyah died, the people of Syria swore allegiance to Yazid. Then he sent to the people of Medina, one who was to take the covenant of allegiance for him, but al Hussain and Ibn u'z Zubayr refused to acknowledge him- and they too went forth in the night to Mecca.

With regard to Ibn u'z Zubayr he neither swore allegiance nor made any pretension on his own account, but as to al Hussain, the people of Kufah had written to him in the time of Mu'awiyah soliciting him to come to them and he had refused, but when Yazid was acknowledged he reverted to what had been formerly meditated, determining at one time to remain and at another purposing to go to them.

Ibn u'z Zubayr counselled him to set out, but Ibn A'bbas used to say " do not do it," and Ibn Omar said to him, " go not forth, for the Lord gave the apostle of God a choice between this world and the next, and he chose the next, and thou art a part of him, and thou shalt not obtain it" meaning the world, and he fell upon his neck and wept and bade him adieu.

Ibn Omar used to say, " al Husain prevailed over us concerning his departure, and by my life, verily he had beheld a warning example in his father and his brother and Jabir-b-A'bdu'Uah and Abu Sa'id, and Abti Wakid al Laythi used to address him similarly, but he did not yield to any of them and resolved upon the journey to Irak, whereupon Ibn A'bbas said to him, " by Allah, verily, I think thou wilt be slain among thy wives and children as Othman was slain." But he did not acquiesce, and Ibn A'bbas wept and said " the eye of the son of az Zubayr hath become refreshed" meaning, that he saw his own way to the Caliphate only through the death of al Hussain whose march to Kufah he had counselled."

Al Suyuti continues:

"And the people of Iraq, sent messengers and letters to al Hussain inviting him among them, whereupon he set forth from Mecca to Iraq A. D. 680. On the 10th of Du'l Hijjah, and with him a party of his household, men, women and children. Then Yazid wrote to Ubaydu'llah-b-Ziyad, his prefect in Iraq to oppose him, and he sent against him an army of four thousand men, commanded by Omar-b-Saa'd-b-Abi Wakkas. And the people of Kufah deserted al Hussain, as had been their way with his father before him, and he

was slain - and his head was carried in a platter until it was placed before Ibn Ziyad may God curse his slayer, and Ibn Ziyad with him and Yazid likewise.” (Tarikhul Khulafa page 209-11)

In brief, this is the event that will change the course of the history of Islam. Those who were most apt to be caliph were discarded in favour of mean chaps who did not care at all for the religion of Islam. The people of that time did not care at all about the Holy Prophet’s kith and kin and in order to exert political power they committed the worst of crimes and tried to eliminate traces of the Holy Prophet’s family. But the courage and sacrifice of Imam Hussein and his family and friends did not go in vain. The whole Islamic world today views the events of Karbala as a tragedy that should not have happened because no Muslim can be happy that any Muslim should have dealt so mercilessly with a person who was so dear to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw). I will read you some extracts from eminent personalities of the world and what they have said about Imam Hussein. When we read these extracts, we understand that the sacrifice of Imam Hussein has made an impact on many people irrespective of their religion or the time that they have lived.

Famous Hungarian orientalist scholar Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) said :

"Ever since the black day of Karbala, the history of this family ... has been a continuous series of sufferings and persecutions. These are narrated in poetry and prose, in a richly cultivated literature of martyrologies - a Shi'i specialty - and form the theme of Shi'i gatherings in the first third of the month of Muharram, whose tenth day (*'ashura*) is kept as the anniversary of the tragedy at Karbala. Scenes of that tragedy are also presented on this day of commemoration in dramatic form (*ta'ziya*). 'Our feast days are our assemblies of mourning.' So, concludes a poem by a prince of Shi'i disposition recalling the many *mihan* of the Prophet's family. Weeping and lamentation over the evils and persecutions suffered by the 'Alid family, and mourning for its martyrs: these are things from which loyal supporters of the cause cannot cease. 'More touching than the tears of the Shi'is' has even become an Arabic proverb." [Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law, Princeton, 1981, p. 179]

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), who was considered the greatest British historian of his time, said: "In a distant age and climate the tragic scene of the

death of Hussein will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader." [The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, London, 1911, volume 5, pp. 391-2]

Edward G. Brown Sir Thomas Adams, Professor of Arabic and oriental studies at the University of Cambridge, said : "... a reminder of the blood-stained field of Kerbela, where the grandson of the Apostle of God fell at length, tortured by thirst and surrounded by the bodies of his murdered kinsmen, has been at anytime since then sufficient to evoke, even in the most lukewarm and heedless, the deepest emotions, the most frantic grief, and an exaltation of spirit before which pain, danger and death shrink to unconsidered trifles." [A Literary History of Persia, London, 1919, p. 227]

Peter J. Chelkowski, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the New York University, wrote: "Hussein accepted and set out from Mecca with his family and an entourage of about seventy followers. But on the plain of Kerbela they were caught in an ambush set by the ... caliph, Yazid. Though defeat was certain, Hussein refused to pay homage to him. Surrounded by a great enemy force, Hussein and his company existed without water for ten days in the burning desert of Kerbela. Finally, Hussein, the adults and some male children of his family and his companions were cut to bits by the arrows and swords of Yazid's army; his women and remaining children were taken as captives to Yazid in Damascus. The renowned historian Abu Reyhan al-Biruni states; "... then fire was set to their camp and the bodies were trampled by the hoofs of the horses; nobody in the history of the human kind has seen such atrocities." [*Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, 1979, p. 2].

Simon Ockley (1678-1720), Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge, wrote "Then Hussein mounted his horse, and took the Koran and laid it before him, and, coming up to the people, invited them to the performances of their duty: adding, 'O God, thou art my confidence in every trouble, and my hope in all adversity!'... He next reminded them of his excellency, the nobility of his birth, the greatness of his power, and his high descent, and said, 'Consider with yourselves whether or not such a man as I am is not better than you; I who am the son of your prophet's daughter, besides whom there is no other upon the face of the earth. Ali was my father; Jaafar and Hamza, the chief of the martyrs, were both my uncles; and the apostle of God, upon whom be peace, said both of me and my brother, that we were the chief of the youth of paradise. If you will believe me, what I say is true, for by God, I never told a lie in earnest since I had my understanding;

for God hates a lie. If you do not believe me, ask the companions of the apostle of God [here he named them], and they will tell you the same....' They asked, 'What hindered him from being ruled by the rest of his relations.' He answered, 'God forbid that I should set my hand to the resignation of my right after a slavish manner. I have recourse to God from every tyrant that doth not believe in the day of account.'" [The History of the Saracens, London, 1894, pp. 404-5]

Since those tragic events that took place in Karbala in the year 680 AD, many books, articles, poems have been written in many languages describing and remembering that tragedy. Incha Allah I will share with you more of these writings in the coming Friday sermons. May Allah help each one amongst to be inspired by the courage and sacrifice of Imam Hussein and his companions forever, incha Allah.