

Zainab bint Ali (S.A.)

The Savior of Karbala

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Hazrat Zainab (S.A.), the daughter of Imam Ali (A.S.) and Hazrat Fatima (S.A.), the sister of Imam Hasan and Imam Husain (Peace be upon them), and the aunt of Imam Zain-ul-Abideen (A.S.), played a critical role in the events surrounding the battle of Karbala. It will not be out of place to say that Zainab (S.A.) immortalized Karbala, and Karbala in turn immortalized her name. How could she accomplish the unthinkable at that time in the history of Islam? To explore the answer, we can very briefly study the three phases of her life: (1) before Karbala (2) at Karbala, and (3) after Karbala.

Zainab (S.A.) before Karbala:

When she was born, Allah sent Angel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh&p) to convey the name Zainab for the child. The significance of this name is that it is composed of the two Arabic root words, *Zain*, meaning “ornament” or “jewel or beauty,” and *Ab*, meaning “father,” making the name translate to “jewel of the father.” This name could not be more fitting. Zainab (S.A.) indeed inherited and exemplified the chivalry, knowledge, oratory, and mastery over Qur’an from her father, Imam Ali (A.S.). He patiently bore the calamities and deprivation of his rights after the death of the Prophet (pbuh&p.), so she patiently bore the calamities and deprivations during and after the death of her brother, Imam Husain (A.S.). Just as he spoke with matchless eloquence against the treachery of the people of Kufa and Damascus during his Khilafat, so did she many years later.

She also inherited the patience and sense of sacrifice from her mother Hazrat Fatima (S.A.). The setbacks and hardships she suffered in her early life were like a training period for the role she would have to play in Karbala. First, her grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh&p) left this world, and then very soon afterwards, her mother passed away. Years later, she lost her father, then soon afterwards, her brother, Imam Hasan. These losses prepared her for the ultimate challenge of Karbala, and its aftermath.

Zainab (S.A.) at Karbala:

Her role in Karbala is well known. Despite hunger, thirst and many hardships, she took charge of the camps, looked after the children and gave them love and assurance when they asked for water. She consoled the adults and was a source of assurance to Imam Husain (A.S.). She helped Imam Husain (A.S.) to mount on his horse to go for the battle when every male member was martyred. She took care of her ailing brother Ali bin Husain.

Zainab (S.A.) After Battle of Karbala.

When the enemy set tents on fire after Imam Husain (A.S.) was martyred, it was Zainab’s (S.A.) organized effort, calmness, lack of panic or despair that saved the lives of innumerable children. She also protected and saved the life of Ali bin Husain, the ailing youth, who also was the Imam of the time. She ensured that all the children were accounted for.

When the family of Imam Husain (A.S.) was taken as prisoners on the way to Kufa and then to Damascus, she did her level best to protect the lives of the children.

Address to people of Kufa: On the streets of Kufa Zainab (S.A.), despite terrible losses, pain, untold sufferings and helplessness, addressed the ignorant and misguided People with courage, calmness, force and clarity. This was the beginning of Imam Husain’s revolution and she had started it. This was

more effective than the modern Media blitz that costs millions of dollars to its users. She identified herself and her lineage and exposed the falsehood and hollowness of Yazid's claims and his monstrous crimes against the family of the Prophet. Excerpts of her speech are given here.

“All praise is due to Allah. Blessing be upon my father Muhammad (pbuh&p) and upon his good and righteous progeny. Well now, O' people of Kufa, people of deception and perfidy, do you weep? May your tears never cease, and may the resounding of this calamity never stop. Your similitude is that of (a woman) who unravels her yarn, disintegrating it after she had spun it strong...

Truly bad is which your souls have committed. You have reaped the wrath of Allah, remaining in the chastisement for eternity. Do you really cry and sob? By Allah, you should then cry a great deal and laugh very little, for you have earned nothing but shame and infamy, and you shall never be able to wash it away. How could you? The descendant of the bearer of the last message, the very essence of the message, the Master of the youth of Paradise, the refuge of the righteous from among you, the beacon of guidance and the keeper of your traditions has been killed.”

Her speech was so powerful that people begged her to stop because they could not bear to withstand her words. They could not stop crying. Imam Ali bin Husain (A.S.) had to intervene and requested her to stop.

Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) in the Court of Ibn Ziyad. The captives were brought in the court of Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad, the Governor of Kufa. He showed contempt for them and boasted about Yazid's victory. He even tried to kill Imam Ali bin Husain (A.S.) and wanted to punish Hazrat Zainab (S.A.). Despite utter helplessness, Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) demonstrated extraordinary poise and calm. She was dignified, courageous and she rebuked Ibn Ziyad at every opportunity. Ibn Ziyad was stunned and frustrated at her fearlessness and courage. Her style was patterned after her father and brothers. Here are some excerpts from her speech:

“Thanks to Allah Who honored us with His Prophet and thoroughly purified us from uncleanness” (In answer to Ibn Ziyad's claim that “Allah killed her brother,” she courageously answered in these words); “It was nothing but good. Those were people who were destined to die, so they came to their appointed places. Allah will gather you and them for judgment. We shall see who will be triumphant on that Day. Woe shall be on you on that day O' son of Mariana.’ Ibn Ziyad was full of rage at these words, but was restrained from hurting her by one of his courtier.”

Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) in the Court of Yazid. In shackles, the captives were brought into the court of Yazid. The court was attended by dignitaries from the Islamic empire as well as representatives from non-Muslim states. In response to Yazid's gloating and insults, Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) gave a courageous and revolutionary speech that demolished Yazid's false honor and brought him low in the presence of his courtiers. This speech is considered as the “culmination of the revolution started by Imam Husain (A.S.).” Excerpts of the speech are presented here.

“All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. Allah's blessings be upon His Messenger, Muhammad (pbuh&p) and his entire progeny. True are the words of Allah Who says, *'Then evil was the end of those who committed evil by rejecting Allah's manifest Signs, mocking them.'* (Al-Qur'an 30:10)

Do you, Yazid, think that, when you blocked all the avenues of the earth and the horizons of the heavens before us, so we were driven as captives, that we are worthless in the sight of Allah, and that you are respectful in His eyes? Or, is it that you enjoy with Allah a high status? You look down upon us and you have become arrogant, because you see the world being submissive to you, while you have usurped our authority and power. But wait! Have you forgotten that Allah has said, *'Do not let those who disbelieve think that Our giving them respite is good for them; We only give respite to them, so that they may increase in sins, and there is a disgraceful chastisement for them.'* (3:178)

Is it fair, O' son of released one (slave), that you keep your women and maidens in their chambers, while you drive the daughters of the Messenger as captives,

without veils in plain sight of all? What would one expect from one, who descended from he, who chewed the liver of the martyr and whose flesh grew on the blood of martyrs. What else can be expected from those, except malice and hatred against us, the Ahl-al-Bayt? You show no guilt or remorse. How dare you hit the lips of Abu 'Abdullah, the master of the youth of paradise? Why should you not do so, since all mercy has been removed from your heart, having shed the blood of the offspring of Muhammad (pbuh&p). Soon you shall be reunited with your ancestors and then you shall wish that you had never said what you said, nor had done what you did... O' Allah, take what belongs to us out of his hands, seek revenge against all those who oppressed us, let Your wrath descend upon whoever shed our blood and killed our protectors.... It is sufficient that Allah is your judge and Muhammad (pbuh&p) is your opponent, and (Archangel) Gabriel is the supporter (of Muhammad). You and all those who instigated you to do what you did, will know for certain how evil is the end of oppressors. Although calamities have forced me to speak to you, I see you trivial in my eyes... Scheme whatever you wish and carry out your plots, by Allah, you shall never be able to obliterate our (honorable) mention, nor be able to destroy the revelations, nor you will ever reach our exalted positions, nor your shame ever be washed away. Your views shall be proven futile, your days are limited in number, and your wealth be wasted on the Day when the caller calls out, '*Now verily, the curse of Allah is on the unjust.*' (Qur'an 11: 18)

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, who sealed the life of our early ones with happiness and forgiveness, and our last ones with martyrdom and Mercy. We plead to Allah to complete His rewards for them, grant them increase, and recompense us and be pleased. He is the most Merciful, the most Compassionate. Allah suffices us and He is the best Guardian.”

Dr. Tawfiq al-Fukaykin says that her speech contained the best of rhetoric, oratory, expression, enthusiasm, convincing allegations, and the defense of belief. He said that her words were “sharper than sword”. The words hit Yazid like spears in his own court and in front of his own people.

The highlights of the speech and its effects may be summarized here.

- ❖ Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) demolished the false claims of honor by Yazid
- ❖ She admonished Yazid for mistreating the family of the Prophet (pbuh&p)
- ❖ She reminded Yazid about misdeeds of his Umayyad ancestors, who fought the Prophet; Hind, his grandmother chewed Hamza's liver. Muawiya, his father, killed innocent Muslims and Abu Sufyan, his grandfather, was the archenemy of Islam.
- ❖ She rebuked Yazid when he said that he has taken revenge against the Prophet and Ali (peace be upon them) who had slain his ancestors. She told that Yazid would meet the same fate as his ancestors.
- ❖ She reminded Yazid that by slaying Imam Husain (A.S.) and other innocent individuals, he has disgraced himself.
- ❖ Despite all the misfortunes, she stood tall and dignified and told Yazid that all his efforts to belittle Ahl-al-Bayt will fail, because they represented the truth.

Hazrat Zainab (S.A.) initiated and propagated the institution of Azadari (mourning) for Imam Husain (A.S.) and other martyrs of Karbala, that continues fourteen hundred years later, wherever lovers of Imam Husain (A.S.) live.

In the end, it will not be out of place to say that Zainab (S.A.) immortalized the story of Karbala and Karbala in turn immortalized her name.