Zaynab's Sermon & Its Historical Background

The Sermon of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn

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Al-Ma'ãrif Publications

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publications@al-m.ca
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين

و الصلاة و السلام على محمد خاتم النبيين و آله الطاهرين

Introduction

Zaynab is the granddaughter of the Prophet of Islam, the daughter of 'Alī and Fãtima, and the sister of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (peace be upon them all). She was born in a holy environment and raised in the laps of infallible parents; and so it was not a surprise to see that Zaynab reached to such a level of wisdom and righteousness that Shī'ī scholars describe her as "*maḥfūẓatun 'anil khaṭã'* – protected from error."

The most important event in Zaynab's life is the tragedy of Karbala, a movement whose first stage was led by Imam Ḥusayn and Zaynab led its second stage. In the post-Karbala events, the sermons of Zaynab are very significant, especially her sermon in the court of Yazid.

To understand the importance and far-reaching impact of Zaynab's sermon, it is necessary to know the history of Shãm and the Umayyid political strategies. In this article, I have tried to present the historical background of the sermon and its important salient features.

Conquest of Shãm & the Family of Abu Sufyãn

When the Great Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) passed away in 11 AH, Islam was confined to the Arabian Peninsula. With the conquests of the caliphs, the Muslim empire expanded to include Shãm, Egypt, Iraq and Persia.

In this historical timeframe, Shãm was not confined to the present-day Syria; rather, until World War I, its borders included Lebanon, Jordan and the entire Palestine. This vast area of the Middle East is collectively known as "ash-Shãmãt – the Greater Syria".[1]

During his reign, the First Caliph dispatched three armies to conquer Shãm. One under the command of 'Amr bin 'Ãṣ towards Palestine; another under the command of Abu 'Ubaydah al-Jarrãḥ towards Ḥimṣ and a third under the command of Yazīd bin Abī Sufyãn, the elder son of Abu Sufyãn, towards Damascus. Yazīd bin Abī Sufyãn was appointed in 13 AH by the First Caliph as the governor of Damascus.[2] At the same time, his younger brother, Mu'ãwiyah, was made the governor of Jordan.

Later on, the Second Caliph not only maintained the ranks of Abu Sufyãn's sons, he actually promoted them. In 18 AH, Yazīd bin Abi Sufyãn and other senior officers died because of an epidemic. Upon Yazīd's death, the Second Caliph appointed

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1 Yaqūt bin 'Abdullãh al-Ḥumawi, *Mu'jamu 'l-Buldãn,* vol. 3 (Beirut: Dãr Ṣãdir, 1995) p. 312 under "ash-Shãm". Ash-Shamãt, in the plural form, refers to the various regions in ash-Shãm.

2 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidãyah wa 'n-Nihãyah,* vol. 7 (Beirut: Dãru 'l-Fikr, 1986) p. 3, 31; Khayru 'd-Dīn Zirkilī, *al-A'lãm,* vol. 7 (Beirut: Dãru 'l-'Ilm, 1989) p. 615; Ibnu 'l-Athīr, *Usdu 'l-Ghãbah,* vol. 4 (Beirut: Dãru 'l-Fikr, 1989) p. 715; aṭ-Ṭabari, *Ta'rīkh,* vol. 3 (Beirut: Dãru 't-Turãth, 1967) p. 387.

Mu'ãwiyah bin Abi Sufyãn to the governorship of Damascus and Jordan.[3]

The Third Caliph promoted Mu'ãwiyah by making him the Governor General of Shãm (covering Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine).[4]

With this brief historical survey, three points become clear:

1. Shãm, during the Prophet's life, was part of the Eastern Roman Empire and mostly a Christian territory.
2. From the first day of its conquest, whatever the people of Shãm came to know of Islam was mostly through the lenses of the family of Abu Sufyãn. Neither had the people of Shãm visited the Prophet nor had they seen the people of Medina. Their only source of understanding Islamic ideals and values was the Banu Umayyah, specifically, the family of Abu Sufyãn.

   The family of Abu Sufyãn fully exploited the ignorance of the people of Shãm and brainwashed them. In order to project Mu'ãwiyah as a close relative of the Prophet, dubious titles like "*khãlu 'l-mu'minīn* – the uncle of the believers" and "*kãtibu 'l-waḥy* – the scribe of the revelation" were widely circulated about him.

   I am using the term "dubious" because neither any of the other brothers-in-law of the Prophet (such as 'Abdullãh bin 'Umar and Muḥammad bin Abi Bakr) were ever known as *"khãlu 'l-mu'minīn;"*[5] nor were Zayd

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3 *Al-Bidãyah wa 'n-Nihãyah,* vol. 8, p. 21; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rīkh* ((Beirut: Dãru 'l-Fikr, 1988) p. 544, 575; aṭ-Ṭabari, *Ta'rīkh,* vol. 4, p. 289.

4 Ibn Sa'd, *aṭ-Ṭabaqãtu 'l-Kubra,* vol. 7 (Beirut: Dãru 'l-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999) p. 285.

5 From the Sunni point of view, 'Ãisha (daughter of Abu Bakr) and Ḥafsa (daughter of 'Umar) are considered more esteemed wives of

bin Thãbit or Khãlid bin Sa'īd were so publicly known as *"kãtibu 'l-waḥy."*[6]

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the Prophet than Ḥabība (daughter of Abu Sufyan). So their brothers, Muḥammad bin Abi Bakr and 'Abdullãh bin 'Umar, were worthier of being called *khãlu 'l-mu'minīn,* more so when they were also sons of the first and the second caliphs respectively.

This seems to be an attempt of inventing same kind of a title that has been given by Allãh to the wives of the Prophet in the Qur'ãn itself (33:6). Those who invented the title of *khãlu 'l-mu'minīn* for Mu'ãwiayh did not reflect on the reason why the wives of the Prophet have been named as *"ummahãtu 'l-mi'minīn* – mothers of the believers." It was so that they, unlike other Muslim widows, cannot remarry anyone; this was out of respect for the Prophet – there are just like their mothers. No such significance has been extended to the Prophet's brothers-in-law; otherwise, they would not be able to marry anyone since they would become the "maternal uncle" of all Muslim women -- a *khãl* cannot marry his niece! So there is no basis for the title "*khãlu 'l-mu'minīn.*"

6 It is amazing to see some Muslims so easily duped by false propaganda. If being *kãtibu 'l-waḥy* was indeed a special honour, then why those who had been with the Prophet from the beginning of the revelation to his death (for more than 22 years) are not known by this title whereas someone who came into the fold of Islam only in the last 3 years of revelation is known as *kãtibu 'l-waḥy*?!

Moreover, Sunni scholars themselves say that Mu'ãwiyah was not the *kãtibu 'l-waḥy,* he was the scribe for some of the letters that the Prophet would write to the tribes. See adh-Dhahabi, *Sayr A'lãmi 'n-Nubalã',* vol. 3 (Beirut: Mu'assasatu 'r-Risãlah, 1993) p. 123; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalãni, *al-Iṣãbah fi 't-Tamiyzi 'ṣ-Ṣahãbah,* vol. 6 (Beirut: Dãru 'l-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995) p. 121.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that among those who used to write the revelation whenever the Prophet would dictate to them also were two individuals ('Abdullãh bin Abi Saraḥ and an ex-Christian) who both used to change what was being dictated, and upon discovery, both fled from the Prophet and his faith!

The reality is that after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet (s.a.w.) considered the people of Mecca, including Abu Sufyãn and his family as "*ṭulaqã'* – the freed slaves" and "*mu'allafatu 'l-qulūb* – those whose hearts have to be reconciled [with Islam]."[7] They were not given any official position by the Prophet as long as he was alive.

3. It was on basis of these twenty to twenty-two years of brainwashing the people of Shãm and establishing his powerbase that Mu'ãwiyah decided to oppose Amīru 'l-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.) and even planned to fight him.

Exploiting the murder of the Third Caliph, Mu'ãwiyah opposed the new ruler chosen by the ummah: Amīru 'l-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.). He had projected such a negative image of Amīru 'l-Mu'minīn in the minds of the people of Shãm that when they got the news that of 'Ali's assassination inside the Grand Mosque of Kufa, they started asking one another that "What was 'Ali doing in the mosque?!" In their minds, 'Ali and mosque could not co-exist together!

Finally, in the year 40 AH, after the peace-treaty, Mu'ãwiyah became the absolute ruler of the Muslim world.

Mu'ãwiyah's Political Strategy

The Umayyid government, established by Mu'ãwiyah bin Abi Sufyãn, was founded on two opposite strategies: propaganda and military might. And both these strategies were used with wicked shrewdness:

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7 See aṭ-Ṭabari, *Ta'rīkh,* vol. 3, p. 61.This refers to those who are not fully convinced of Islam but can be helped with charity with the hope that they hearts could be reconciled with Islam.

1. The domination over Shãm was maintained by propaganda.
2. The domination of all other regions (Hijãz, Irãq, Yemen, Persia and Egypt) was maintained by military might.

For a better understanding of these two opposite political strategies, a survey of the present political strategy of the United State of America would be helpful. America's domestic and foreign policies are based on two different strategies:

Domestic Policy: it is based on the liberal democratic system in which the public opinion is respected. Media, of course, plays a pivotal role in forming the public opinion; and, therefore, whatever party can mold the public opinion gets the majority votes. In such a democratic system, the public can even remove the President (e.g., Nixon) from the office.

Foreign Policy: the same democratic America, when pursing its own interests globally, very readily ignores the public opinion of other nations and uses its military might directly or through local dictators to impose its will.

Keeping these two different policies of America in mind, I apply that to Mu'ãwiyah's strategies: he maintained power within the country (i.e., Shãm) on basis of propaganda, and he maintained power outside the country (i.e., Iraq, Hijaz, Yemen, Persia and Egypt) on basis of Shãm's military might.

In order to control the minds of the people of Shãm, Mu'ãwiyah had advised his son, Yazīd, that whenever he would have to quell the uprisings in other countries, he should indeed use the Shãmi forces and once he has quelled the rebellion, he should bring the Shãmi forces back to their country "because if they stay [longer] in other countries, their

behavior would change."[8] 'Behavioral change' actually refers to the broadening of their minds and their exposure to the real image of the family of Abu Sufyãn and its continuous opposition to the Prophet of Islam until it was finally subdued in the conquest of Mecca.

Ḥusayn's Strategy

It was in such a context that Imam Husayn bin 'Ali (a.s.) analyzed the Muslim world and he saw that the ummah was suffering from two problems: (1) Inside Shãm, the Muslims suffered from *ignorance and misinformation;* and (2) outside Shãm (Hijaz, Iraq, Persia, Yemen and Egypt), the Muslims suffered from *apathy and a slumbering conscience*.

Two different social ills required two different solutions: outside Shãm, the ummah required *"awakening;"* and inside Shãm, the ummah required *"awareness."*

For revival of and awakening the slumbering conscience of the ummah, Ḥusayn chose the path of martyrdom and sacrifice.

For creating awareness among the people of Shãm and dispelling the misinformation from them, Ḥusayn needed the help of the women of his family who would fulfill that task when taken as prisoners to Shãm.

Ḥusayn took the responsibility of awakening the slumbering conscience of the ummah while Zaynab took the responsibility of creating awareness among the people of Shãm – that is why Zaynab is known as "*Sharīkatu 'l-Ḥusayn* – the Partner of Ḥusayn."

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8 Ibnu 'l-Athīr, *al-Kãmil,* vol. 4 (Beirut: Dãr Ṣãdir, 1965) p. 6; aṭ-Ṭabari, *Ta'rīkh,* vol. 5, p. 323.

The summary of this analysis is that Muʻãwiyah had built an "iron curtain" around Shãm which blocked any idea from reaching the people, and their minds remained intoxicated with Umayyid propaganda. This "wall of propaganda" was so strong that neither ʻAli's sword could bring it down nor could Ḥasan's peace make a crack in it, and even Ḥusayn's innocent blood could not dampen its foundation. Indeed, that wall came crumbling down with the sermons of Lady Zaynab and Imam Zaynul ʻÃbidīn!

The Atmosphere of Yazīd's Court

The court of Yazīd was filled with senior officials, dignitaries of Shãm, some ambassadors of foreign governments and religious leaders of other faiths. It was in such a setting that the family of Imam Ḥusayn (a.s.) was brought in as prisoners without any veils or scarfs.

A herald was constantly announcing in the bazar as well as the imperial court that the head of a dissident is being brought who had rebelled against the caliph. The blessed head of Imam Ḥusayn (a.s.) was presented to Yazīd on a silver plate and placed in front of his throne.

Overcome with his apparent victory, Yazīd started poking the blessed head of Imam Ḥusayn (a.s.) with his stick and expressing his joy by reciting the following lines of a blasphemous poetry of ʻAbdullãh bin az-Zibaʻrī:

The Hãshimites[9] *staged a drama for domination*
For there was no Divine news nor any revelation
Wish my ancestors killed in Badr would see
The pain of Khazraj caused by pointed spears

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9 This refers in general to Banū Hãshim, the family of the Prophet.

Yazīd's display of arrogance and blasphemous words prompted Lady Zaynab to stand up and address him in the court filled with the elite of Shãm. The aura of her personality even as a prisoner and the eloquence of her speech were such that Yazīd could not do anything to prevent her from speaking!

Zaynab's Sermon[10]

(1) The Preamble

All praise is due to Allãh, the Lord of the universe; and blessings be upon my grandfather, the chief of God's messengers.
Indeed Almighty Allãh has spoken the truth when He said, *"Then the final state of those who do evil (deeds) was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to ridicule them."* (30:10)

First comment: Zaynab puts an emphasis that the Prophet is "my grandfather;" he is from our family, from 'Ali's family; and not from your family, O Yazīd!

Second comment: Zaynab's mastery over the Qur'ãn become obvious by her selection of verses in this sermon. After praising Allãh and asking for blessing upon the Prophet, she recites the first verse that is very befitting for the occasion and is fully

10 The text of this sermon is presented here from one Sunni and two Shī'ī sources: Aḥmad bin Abi Ṭãhir Ṭayfūr (d. 280), *Balãghãtu 'n-Nisã'* (Cairo: Madrasa Wãlid 'Abbãs I, 1908) p. 25-27; Aḥmad bin Abi Ṭãlib aṭ-Ṭabrisi, *al-Iḥtjãj,* vol. 2 (Najaf: Dãru 'n-Nu'mãn, 1966) p. 35-37; Ibn Ṭã'ūs, *al-Malhūf 'ala Qatla 'ṭ-Ṭufūf* (Qum: Dãru 'l-Uswah, 1425 AH), p. 215-218.

applied on Yazīd. In other words, she is saying that O Yazīd, the lines of poetry that you recited demonstrates that those who do evil deeds will eventually deny the Qur'ãn as a revelation and ridicule it. (The "signs of Allah" could refer to the Qur'ãn as well as the blessed head of Imam Ḥusayn.)

> Do you think, O Yazid, now that you have 'seized the vastness of the earth from us and constrained the horizons upon us,'[11] and that we are being herded like the prisoners—that Allãh wishes humiliation for us and honor for you? And that in this is a great importance for you with Allãh? So you are being haughty and looking around exuberantly and happily since you see that the world is in your control and its affairs are lined up for you, and our country is exclusively for you and our government is purely for you.
> But hold on and slow down! Have your forgotten Almighty Allãḥ's words: *"Let the faithless not suppose that the respite that We grant them is good for their souls: We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and [eventually] there is a humiliating punishment for them."* (3:178)

Third comment: Lady Zaynab did not address the ruthless ruler by his common titles; rather she addressed him by his name only. This was a slap on his face!

Fourth comment: Look at the courage of the daughter of "Allãh's lion:" right in the court of Yazid, she describes his rule

[11] It means that you have made us prisoners and taken away our freedom to move around.

and government as an usurped power and claims it to be her family's right.

Fifth comment: By quoting the verse from Chapter Three, she tells Yazid that he should not considered his apparent victory as a sign of Allãh's pleasure. They may be delay in reprisal but it will eventually come.

(2) <u>Exposing Yazīd's Family Background</u>

O the son of the freed slave! Is it just that you cover your women and slave-girls with veils while you parade the daughters of Allãh's Messenger as prisoners?! You have torn their apparel coverings, exposed their faces, and the enemies ushered them on from one city to another. The dwellers of the caravansaries as well as the cities were looking towards them, and the people from near and far as well as the noble and the servants were scrutinizing their faces while they had neither a helper from their menfolk nor a protector from their protectors.

First comment: "O son of the freed slave!" In the imperial court of Yazid, right in presence of the elite and the government officials of Shãm, Zaynab exposes his family background. At the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH, after seeing the strength of the Muslim army, Yazid's grandfather, Abu Sufyan, and his family converted to Islam. If Zaynab's grandfather, the Prophet of Islam, had wished he could have made the people of Mecca (including Abu Sufyãn and his family) as his personal slaves. But the Prophet manifested his benevolence and emancipated the people of Mecca by saying, "…Go, you are

free…;"[12] in other words, 'I could have made your my slaves but I let you go as freed slaves.'

With such an exposure, the people of Shãm heard for the first time that Yazid's grandparents and father embraced Islam in the later years of the Prophet's life and that they were the Prophet's freed slaves. Such a revelation must have shattered the aura of "*khãlu 'l-mu'minīn* – the uncle of the believers" from the minds of the people of Shãm!

(3) <u>Exposing Yazīd's Behavioral Background</u>

There is neither anything unusual about you nor any surprise in your actions. How can there be any hope of consideration from child of a person whose mouth spat the liver of the righteous ones and whose flesh grew upon the blood of the martyrs. A person who looks towards us with disdain, rancor, vendetta and secret grudge does not wait long before displaying his hatred towards us, the Ahlul Bayt.

First Comment: Zaynab now describes the behavioral profile of Yazīd: a profile in which she cannot expect any justice because his character is influenced by his grandmother, Hind, a ruthless and immoral person. As a proof to the people of Shãm, Zaynab refers to the Battle of Uḥud in which Yazīd's grandmother ordered her slave to cut open the abdomen of Ḥamza (the Prophet's uncle), from which she took out his liver and tried to chew on it. That is why Yazīd's grandmother came to be known as "*ãkilatu 'l-akbãd* – the liver-eater."

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[12] Aṭ-Ṭabari, *Ta'rīkh,* vol. 3, p. 61.

Second Comment: Lady Zaynab also exposes Yazid's inner hatred towards the family of the Prophet (the Ahlul Bayt). She informs the people of Shãm that the family of Abu Sufyãn is not part of the family of the Prophet; on the contrary, their hearts are filled with hatred towards the family of the Prophet, and they don't hesitate in expressing their rancor. This is so, while all Muslim sects believe that based on the verse of *muwaddah* (42:23), to love the Prophet's family is an essential part of Islamic faith.

(4) <u>Yazīd's Intentions</u>

With happiness you call out your ancestors:
They would cheer and beam with joy
Saying: O Yazid, may you not be overcome

[You are reciting this] while bending down targeting the teeth of Abu 'Abdillãh [al-Ḥusayn], chief of the youths of Paradise, and poking at them with your cane—your face had lit up with joy.
I swear by my life that by spilling the blood of Muhammad's children and the star of the family of 'Abdul Muṭṭalib (i.e., Ḥusayn), you have scratched the [old] wound and revived the [past] animosity.
You are loudly calling out your ancestors, and think that you are actually calling them! [They are dead and they can't hear you!] Very soon, you will reach their place [in the hell], and at that time you would wish that you had become paralyzed and dumb so that you would have not said what you had said and not done what you had done.

> O Allãh, take our right [from those who had usurped it], take revenge from those who have oppressed us, and unleash Your wrath on one who has spilled our blood and killed our supporters.

First Comment: In the midst of the elite of Shãm, Lady Zaynab describes the difference between the family of the Prophet and the family of Abu Sufyãn: If the blessed head that Yazid is desecrating is that of the chief of the youths of Paradise, then what will be the eventual destination of Yazīd? If the one who was killed is the chief of the youths of Paradise, then the killer cannot be from those who will be in Paradise!

Second Comment: Why was Imam Ḥusayn (a.s.) killed? By repeating the poems recited by Yazīd, Zaynab wanted to show that he killed Imam Ḥusayn to avenge the death of his idol-worshipping/infidel ancestors who were killed in the Battle of Badr, the first battle in the history of Muslims. In that battle, when the father, the brother and the uncle of Yazid's grandmother challenged the Muslim fighters to a duel, the Prophet (s.a.w.) sent some members of his family, the Banu Hãshim: Ḥamzah, 'Ubaydah and 'Ali—it was by their swords that the leaders of idol-worshippers were killed.

By killing Imam Ḥusayn and other members of the Prophet's family, Yazid was avenging the death of his infidel ancestors.

Third Comment: O Yazid, you are calling out to your ancestors but soon you will also end up with them, and then you will regret and wish that your tongue had become dumb so that you would have recited the blasphemous poems, and had not got involved in killing Imam Ḥusayn (a.s.)—but alas, regret at that time will be of no use.

(5) <u>The End of Yazid</u>

(O Yazīd,) you have done what you wanted to do. (By doing what you have done,) you have actually pierced your own skin and have torn your own flesh. You will surely be presented to the Messenger of Allãh with your crime of spilling the blood of his descendants and your act of violating the sanctity of his family and relatives. At that time, Allãh will unite them, end their separation, avenge those who oppressed them, and take their right from their enemies.

So do not let [your act of] killing them fill your excitement. [Do not you remember what Allãh has said:] *And do not consider those who are killed in the way of Allãh as dead; rather they are alive with their Lord, being sustained; they are pleased with what Allãh has given to them out of His grace.* (3:169-170)

It suffices for you to know that (on the day of judgement), Allãh will be the Judge, the Messenger of Allãh will be plaintiff [against you], and Jibra'īl will be the supporter [of the Prophet]. Those who facilitated [the government] for you and imposed you on the necks of the Muslims will soon know how evil shall be the recompense of the transgressors, and who among you will be in the worst place and the most misguided.

First Comment: Zaynab is reminding Yazid that don't think by killing my brother and family, you have eliminated them. No, not at all; they are martyrs in the way of Allãh – they live not only in the other world, sustained by Almighty's grace, but they will always live in the hearts of the believers.

Second Comment: With Allãh as the judge, the Prophet as the plaintiff and Jibra'il as the witness what chance has Yazid escaping retribution on the day of judgement?! This is a point on what those Muslims should also reflect who go around preaching that Yazid is among the "forgiven ones"!

(6) Challenging Yazid

Plan your stratagem, strive to your maximum, and put your best efforts but, by Allãh, neither will you be able to erase our memory [from the people's minds] nor can you destroy our revelation, nor can you reach our heights, and your shame [for killing Husayn] cannot be washed out.
Your idea is nothing but wrong, your days are numbered, and your gathering will soon disperse—the day when the herald will announce: Verily the curse of Allãḥ is on the oppressors!

First Comment: Zaynab challenges Yazid on his own turf to do whatever is within his power but he will not be able to erase the religion of her grandfather or the Qur'ãn which was revealed upon him or the love for his family that is found in hearts of the Muslims.

Second Comment: Since Zaynab always maintained the *zikr* and remembrance of Allãh even in the most difficult of times (to the extent that in spite of hunger and thirst, and having witnessed the murder of eighteen members of her family in one day, she did not forget her night *nafila* on the eve of 11th Muḥarram)—and so Allãh has also kept the memory of Zaynab always alive in hearts of the people. Even centuries after her

passing away, Zaynab's name is remembered and mentioned all over the world whereas Yazid's name has become like a swear word. No one knows of Yazid's grave whereas there are two famous shrines associated to Zaynab: one in Damascus and another in Cairo, and both shrines are filled with visitors and pilgrims whose prayers are answered in those places!

(7) Last Sentences of the Sermon

So all praise is due to Allãh who granted our ancestors the bliss and our present generation the honor of martyrdom; and we ask Allãh to complete their reward and give them even more, and make us their worthy successors. He is indeed Merciful and Loving; Allãh is sufficient for us and He is the best supporter.

The Result of the Sermon

Finally, the true face of the family of Abu Sufyãn was exposed to the people of Shãm by this sermon. Let alone the Muslims of Shãm, even the Jewish, Christians and foreign representatives stationed in Damascus criticized Yazīd for violating the sanctity of the family of his own Prophet by killing its men and imprisoning its women.

The sermon of Lady Zaynab and the sermon of Imam Zaynul 'Abidīn complement one another: Zaynab's sermon formed the *"tabarra"* dimension and Imam Zaynul 'Abidīn's sermon formed the *"tawalla"* dimension: the former exposed the real identity of Abu Sufyan's family while the latter introduced the real image of the Prophet's family.

Both these sermons brought down the "iron curtain" erected by the family of Abu Sufyãn around Shãm, and the government of Abu Sufyan's family crumbled in such a way that Yazid's son, Mu'ãwiyah, refused to sit on the throne and the Umayyid government moved to the family of Marwãn.

This was the beginning of the end of the Umayyid power. *And the wrongdoers will soon know to what destination they will return.* (26:227)

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The Sermon of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn

Introduction

The historical narrations that have reached to us are somewhat ambiguous as far as the timeline of the sermon of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn 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 Yazīd 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 Ḥusayn 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'ãwiyah and Yazīd.

When Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn 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 Allãh 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 Allãh 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 Sufyãn."

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 Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn got on the pulpit and gave a sermon in which he focused on the family of Imam 'Ali and the Prophet.

(1) <u>Preamble:</u>

All praise is due to Allãh 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 Allãh, the King, the All-Knowing.

(2) <u>The Status of Prophet's Family</u>

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, Muḥammad 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 [Ḥamzah] is from us,
[5] the chief of the women of the worlds, the pure Fãṭimah, is from us, and
[6-7] the Prophet's two grandsons in this community [Ḥasan & Ḥusayn] 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 *(tawãf)* and *sa'ī*, I am the son of the best one who did the pilgrimage and responded to Allãh's call, I am the son of the one who was carried on the Burãq on the air, I am the son of one who was taken

[1] The Imam symbolically relates himself to the holy places of Islam.

in the night journey from Masjidul Ḥarãm to Masjid al-Aqsa, [1] I am the son of the one who reached with Jibra'il [in his ascension] to the *sidratul muntaha* (the holiest spot in heaven),[2] 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 Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa.

[Who was my grandfather?]
I am the son of 'Ali al-Murtaza, I am son of the one who subdued the people till they said: *la ilãha illal lãh,* I am the son of the one who fought in defense of the Prophet with two swords and two spears, did two migrations,[3] pledged allegiance to the Prophet twice,[4] prayed towards two *qiblahs,* courageously fought in Badr and Ḥunayn, and never ever disbelieved in Allah!
I am the son of 'the righteous one among the believers,'[5] the successor of the prophets, destroyer of the disbelievers, leader of the Muslims, light of the *mujãhidin,* 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

1 "Burãq" refers to the mount used for taking the Prophet to his ascension from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to the heavens.
2 Refers to 53:14
3 Could refer to the Shi'b Abi Ṭalib and Medina or to Medina and Kufa.
4 In the pledge of al-'Aqaba and the pledge of Riḍwãn in Ḥudaybiyya.
5 Refers to 66:4.

from the family of Ṭaḥa and Yãsin, the Messenger of the Lord of the universe.
I am the son of the one who was supported by Jibra'il and Mikã'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 Allãh 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 Allãh against the hypocrites; the tongue of the wisdom of the worshippers, the helper of Allãh's religion, the friend of Allãh, the garden of Allãḥ's wisdom, the vessel of Allãh's knowledge… the father of the two grandsons of the Prophet, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, demonstrator of the extra-ordinary feats, destroyers of the divisions, the shooting star, the lasting light, the victorious lion of Allãh – that is my grandfather, 'Ali bin Abī Ṭãlib.

[Who is my grandmother?]
I am the son of Fãṭimatu 'z-Zahrã', I am the son of the chief of the women, I am the son of the pure Batūl, I am the son of 'the part of the Messenger;' and I am the son of Khadījatu '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 Shãm.

According to the narrations, Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn 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, "*Allãhu akbar* – Allãh is the greatest," and the Imam affirmed the greatness of Allah. Then the mu'adhdhin said, "*Ash-hadu an lã ilãha il-lal-lãh* – I bear witness that there is no god but Allãh," and the Imam affirmed the unity of God.

When the mu'adhdhin uttered the third phrase of the adhãn, "*ash-hadu anna Muḥammadan Rasūlu 'l-lãh* – I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah," the Imam turned towards Yazīd and said:

> O Yazid! This Muḥammad is my grandfather or your grandfather? If you say that he is your grandfather, then you are a liar and you will become kãfir; 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?...

Yazīd ordered the mu'adhdhin to start the iqãmah to start the prayer. Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn's speech had such an impact that many people stood up and left without praying behind Yazīd.

* * * * *

Conclusion:

The sermon of Lady Zaynab exposed the true face of the family of Abu Sufyãn to the people of Shãm, and the sermon of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Ãbidīn showed the true status of the Ahlul Bayt to the people of Shãm.

Its immediate result was that Yazīd feared the reaction of the people and started distancing himself from the killing of Imam Ḥusayn bin 'Ali and blaming everything on Ibn Ziyãd! He was forced to release the family of Ahlul Bayt and send them to Medina respectfully.

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The Saga of Karbala did not end with the martyrdom of Hussain, nor did his mission. His death was the initiation of a long ordeal faced by the family of Imam Hussain (a.s.). During this ordeal, it was the timeless sermons of Bibi Zainab and the fourth Imam Sajjad (a.s.) which truly pierced the hardened hearts of the people, sparked a revolution, and introduced change.

The sermon of Lady Zaynab and the sermon of Imam Zaynul 'Abidīn complement one another: Zaynab's sermon formed the *"tabarra"* dimension and Imam Zaynul 'Abidīn's sermon formed the *"tawalla"* dimension: the former exposed the real identity of the oppressors, while the latter introduced the true, pure image of the Prophet's family.

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