

Chapter 14: Imam Husayn Encounters Hurr

Imam Husayn encountered Hurr and his companions on the 1st of Muharram, 61 A.H. and provided them water to satiate their thirst. It was now the time for noon prayers and Hajjaj bin Masruq Juafi, one of the honorable martyrs of Karbala, pronounced *azan* (call to prayers) under the orders of the Imam.

The Imam then came out of his tent and conversed with them after the call to prayers. Then after praising the Almighty Allah he said, "O people! My excuse before Allah and you Muslims of Kufa is that I did not proceed to Iraq without reason. Your representatives came to me and you wrote in your letters that you had no Imam and asked me to come to you so that Allah might guide you through me. I have come now. If you are prepared to assure me by renewing your promises and covenants I shall come to your city, but if you don't do so or are worried and disturbed on account of my arrival I am prepared to return to the place from which I have come". Hurr and his companions did not, however, give any reply to the Imam.

As directed by the Imam, Hajjaj pronounced *iqamah* and both the armies offered congregational prayers led by the Imam, and after taking rest they also offered the afternoon prayers in a similar way.

After the prayers the Imam spoke to the companions of Hurr once again and said: "O people! If you fear Allah and are pious and recognize the right of the rightful persons Allah will be pleased with you (here also by the word 'right' the Imam did not mean to tell the people that, for example, they should not pare the wall of their neighbor while they are constructing a building, or should not try to board a vehicle earlier than another passenger who enjoys priority. The Imam meant the right, which is the basis of all the rights i.e. the right of Imamate and leadership of the Muslims of the world, for if that right is secure all other rights are also secure, but if that right is eliminated all other rights are also violated).

Then he said: "We the members of the family of the Holy Prophet are the fittest persons to govern you and to exercise authority over you in material and religious matters as compared with the persons, who are at the helm of affairs these days. They are unreasonable persons and claim to hold a very sacred and delicate office which they do not deserve. They oppress you. Such persons cannot be recognized to be the successors of the Holy Prophet, Imams of the Muslims, defenders of the sacred religion of Islam and the protectors of the Holy Qur'an".

Hurr bin Yazid Riyahi said in reply to the remarks of the Imam: "I swear by Allah that I am not aware of the letters and the messengers." The Imam asked Uqbah bin Saman (who was made captive on the day of Ashura but was set free later) to place the letters of the Kufians before Hurr and his men."

However, Hurr said again: "We have not written any letter and we shall not leave you until we take you before Ibn Ziyad". The Imam said: "This is not possible before death". The Imam and Hurr mounted along with their respective companions and adopted a route that led neither to Madina nor to Kufa. In the meantime Hurr said to the Imam by way of sympathy and advice: "I entreat you in the name of Allah not to fight, because if you fight you will be killed". The Imam got excited and said: "Do you threaten me with death? Will you be comforted by killing me? My reply is the same which the man

from Aws tribe gave when he wanted to support the Holy Prophet, but his cousin warned him of being killed and said: "Where are you going? You will be killed".

That Awsi man replied: "I have selected my path and for a brave man, whose intentions are good, who does not lose the spirit of Islam in the path of jihad and does not care for his life in assisting the good people, keeps aloof from the ignoble persons, and does not accompany the wicked, it is not a matter of shame to die honorably. If I live I will not have to regret and in case I lay down my life in this path I shall not be reproached. The baseness of man lies in the fact that he should live an ignominious and shameful life."

Imam Husayn and Hurr accompanied by their respective companions reached a halting place called Bayza. Here also the Imam spoke to those people and made it clearer than before that at that time he was under an obligation to perform a duty. The contents of this speech of his are as follows:

"Yazid is a tyrannical and oppressive caliph, who considers lawful the things declared by Allah to be unlawful. He breaks Divine covenants, opposes the path of the Prophet and oppresses the people. The Holy Prophet has said that in such circumstances if someone does not restrain such a caliph with his words and conduct from committing evil deeds it is necessary for Allah to send him to the same place to which He sends that oppressive caliph".

It is the same thing to which the Holy Qur'an has alluded in these words:

We have made some of the Imams {leaders} lead their followers to the Fire. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:41)

All the leaders do not take their followers to Paradise. Some of the Imams and leaders of the nation guide the people towards Paradise and good fortune, and that Paradise means in the general sense of progress, prosperity and greatness in this world as well as in the Hereafter. However, according to the Holy Qur'an and historical experience some Imams, like Yazid, drag their followers towards fire, torture and certain downfall.

The Imam then explained more explicitly the conditions prevailing during those days in 60 A.H. and said: "You should know that these people namely the agents of the Caliphate of Bani Umayyad follow Satan, carry out his orders and do not forsake his obedience. In the same proportion they have disobeyed Allah and started committing crimes openly and have suspended the Divine punishments.

They have appropriated the property of the Muslims to themselves i.e. they have allocated to themselves the money which should have been credited to the public treasury of the Muslims; spent for their own selfish desires. They have treated the things made lawful by Allah to be unlawful and those made unlawful by Him to be lawful. Now that they have created these conditions, who can be more responsible to change them and eliminate the causes of the decline of the Muslims in accordance with the orders of the Holy Prophet than myself. I am Husayn bin Ali, the son of Fatima, and one of those for whose sake the verse of Purification (33:33) and the verse of Mubahila (3:61) were revealed, and I am the disciple of Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful".

Indeed, who could perform the task performed by Husayn bin Ali? Who could obtain friends like his friends and who could take his place in this movement?

Ibn Abbas was a great scholar and commentator of the Holy Qur'an, a distinguished companion of the Holy Prophet and his cousin. However, he could not perform the task performed by Husayn bin Ali. Muhammad bin Hanafiya was the brother of the Imam and son of Ali ibn Abi Talib but he was not equal to this occasion.

Habib ibn Mazahir Asadi was a companion of the Holy Prophet, but was not capable of doing what Imam Husayn did. Same was the case with Muslim bin Awsaja and Hani bin Urwa Muradi. Imam Husayn's cousin Muslim bin Aqil, his worthy and honorable brother Abbas, and his dear, brave and pious son Ali bin Husayn were all very great and magnanimous persons, who displayed astonishing valor and self-sacrifice in this great Islamic movement and cooperated with him fully.

However, notwithstanding all their magnanimity and great personality none of them could become the central point of this sacred movement. The nucleus and the spiritual power of this Divine movement was hidden in the personality of Imam Husayn. It was this very spiritual power which guided this movement till its last stage and even prepared his survivors for its guidance till they were subjected to extreme torture and captivity.

Then the Imam said: "I am in receipt of your letters through messengers telling me about your allegiance and steadfastness in the path of truth. You have written that whatever the circumstances might be you would not forsake me and would not surrender me to the enemy. Now if you stick to your oath of allegiance and your decision and, as was written by you, do not desist from assisting me you will enjoy good luck, for I am the son of Ali and Fatima and shall remain with you in this sacred jihad.

My wives and children will share the fate of your wives and children. It does not also behoove you to hold the lives of your wives and children dearer than the lives of my family. When I am ready to sacrifice my own life as well as the lives of the members of my family, you, too, should not spare your own lives as well as the lives of the members of your family".

In other words he said: "Now that I am prepared for being martyred along with my companions and for my women and children being made captives in the path of enjoining to do good and restraining from evil and have brought my dear ones along with me so that you may have no excuse left, it is also your duty that you should follow your Imam and should not falter in the path of Allah. You should not be distressed on account of being killed or made captives, and should not lag behind in assisting the Imam of the time and son of your Prophet.

However, if, in spite of all this, you break your promise and abandon allegiance to me I swear by my life that such an action by people like you will not surprise me, because you have behaved in this very manner towards my father Ali, my brother Hasan and my cousin Muslim bin Aqil. A person who trusts you and becomes proud of your promise is deluded. Nevertheless you should know that if you do so the loss will be yours. You will be deprived of good luck. Whoever breaks his promise is a loser himself and it is possible that Allah may soon make me independent of your assistance".

The Imam delivered this address before one thousand persons who were the companions of Hurr and all of them heard it, but there was only one person who was impressed by it and showed after a few days that he had properly comprehended the lesson taught by the Imam.

That person was Hurr bin Yazid Riyahi. In the morning of the day of Ashura he went to Umar bin al-Sad and said to him: "Are you really going to fight with Husayn bin Ali? Umar replied: "I swear by Allah that I shall fight with him and it will be a tough fight too". Hurr said: "Is there any harm if you accept one of the offers made by the Imam?" Umar replied: "If I had possessed authority there would have been no harm and I would have accepted it, but Ibn Ziyad is not prepared to accept anyone of them."

It was at this time that a dangerous conflict commenced between the intellect and passions of this lucky man. It was necessary that he should submit either to the spiritual power or the Satanic temptation. At last, however, the celestial spark which the Imam's words had kindled in his heart prevailed over the devil of his passions and he chose the Divine path and said: ..By Allah; I have reached a place where the ways to Paradise and Hell part. By Allah, even if I am cut to pieces and burnt a number of times I shall not prefer anything to Paradise".

Then Hurr proceeded to the camp of the Imam. There he confessed his sin, adopted the right path and said: "Almighty Allah knows that I was not aware that the matters would take such a turn. I have now come to repent, but I do not know whether my repentance can be accepted". The Imam replied: "Of course, Allah will accept your repentance and shall forgive you". Then the Imam asked his name. He replied: "I am Hurr bin Yazid".

The Imam said: "You are a free person as your mother named you Hurr (free). You are free in this world as well as in the Hereafter. You should dismount now." He said: "Will it not be better that I should combat with these horsemen for some time and dismount after attaining the honor of martyrdom?" The Imam replied: "May Allah bless you. You may do as you like".

Hurr returned to the people of Kufa and began talking to those persons who were his colleagues and fellow-soldiers an hour earlier. He reproached them for their betrayal and faithlessness and spoke thus to the army of which he himself had been a commander: "O people of Kufa! May you die and may Allah make your mothers mourn. You invited this servant of Allah, and when he accepted your invitation and came to you, you withheld your assistance from him. You, who promised earlier that you would sacrifice your lives for his sake, have encircled him today and have drawn your swords to kill him.

You have besieged him and made it impossible for him to breathe. You are troubling him from every side and do not wish that he should be free, and he and the members of his family should find refuge somewhere. You have made him helpless like a captive. You have deprived him and his women, children and companions of the water of the river Euphrates which is drunk by all Muslims and non-Muslims, and in which the desert birds of Iraq bathe. They are almost exhausted on account of thirst. How badly you have treated the descendants of the Holy Prophet after him! If you do not repent even now, and do not abandon the idea of killing him, Allah will not quench your thirst on the Day of Judgment".

These were the words of the fortunate man who had one day blocked the way of the Imam of his time, alarmed his women and children, made him camp under the orders of Ibn Ziyad in a desert away from human habitation and had collaborated with his enemies from the 2nd of Muharram till the morning of the 10th Muharram.

However, within less than an hour his spirit underwent a change and he suddenly began to crave for martyrdom. He became so self-sacrificing in the path of truth that he could no longer content himself with worldly thoughts and hope for life; he did not forsake eternal happiness. Allah says:

Allah is the Guardian of the believers. He takes them out of darkness into light. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:257)

The same invisible Hand, which pulls out the undeserving persons from martyrdom and eternal good name, aids the people of noble spirit from different places into the domain of martyrdom and self-sacrifice and places Hurr bin Yazid Riyahi, the commander of the enemy's army into the row of Habib ibn Mazahir Asadi and Burayr bin Khuzayr Hamdani and even in the row of Ali bin Husayn, Qasim bin Hasan and other Hashimi young men.