

BETTER DEATH

Batath

Death

THAN LIFE IN HUMILIATION

It was the time of first confrontation between the army men of Ali bin Abi Talib (A.S.) and those of Muawiya bin Abi Sufyan in the battle of Siffin in the year 36 A.H. Ali (A.S.) was keen to see the representatives of both the sides to meet and iron out their differences rather than commence fighting.

However, he noticed that all of a sudden the army men of Muawiya 40,000 strong advanced and captured the area where water supply was normally obtained. The aim was to cut off the supply to Ali (A.S.) and his men, since it would not be easy for them to draw water from other areas, being surrounded by hillcocks.

Despite his protest to this, that the battle had not started and that the desire was first to enter into mutual discussion to avoid bloodshed, yet the enemy did not respond favourably. So it was a question of either to fight and safeguard ~~one~~ human right or suffer thirst and humiliation at the hands of the enemy.

It was a situation that called for a hard decision from Ali (A.S.) who was already much enraged. Standing before his men, he delivered a rousing sermon, some words of which, as recorded in Nahjul Balagha, were:

"They (the Syrians) are hungry of fighting. So either you remain in humiliation and low position or drench your swords with blood and quench your thirst with water. Real death is in life of subjugation while real life is in dying as subjugators (conquerors)"

قَدْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ لَكُمْ الْقِتَالَ فَأَقْرُوا عَلَى
مَذَلَّةٍ وَتَأْخِيرِ مَحَلَّةٍ أَوْ رَوْا
السُّيُوفَ مِنَ الدَّمَاءِ تَرُدُّوا مِنْ
الْمَاءِ فَالْمَوْتُ فِي حَيَاتِكُمْ
مَقْتُولِينَ وَالْحَيَاةُ فِي مَوْتِكُمْ
قَاهِرِينَ

What the Imam meant to say that true life was in fighting the enemy to the last and be prepared to die. Whereas death was in fact with those who did not do so and accept to live in humiliation at the hands of the oppressors.

The foregoing words of valour had aroused his men so much that within two hours, they succeeded in pushing the 40,000 men of Muawiya away from the water hole and supply position.

They were compelled to retreat from the river bank and it was they then that needed water to quench their thirst.

But did Ali (A.S.) then deny water ^{to} the enemy? No, he told his men to allow them everyday to enter the place and refill their waterbags. His men argued that why should they do so and not retaliate when it was the enemy who had first denied water to them. To this, Ali (A.S.) said that this would be an inhuman act. Water is such that every life has a right over it, so let them have it.

Thus it was an outstanding show of valour and willingness to die with honour rather than accept subjugation and witness human right be trampled upon.

It was also an extra-ordinary display of humanity and generosity towards the enemy.

Following the noble footsteps of his father, Husain bin Ali (A.S.) also displayed the same sense of valour and high principles of life, the willingness to die with honour, rather than live in humiliation. When confronted by Hur on way to Kerbala and frightened of Yazid's determination to kill him, the Imam retorted by reciting the following poems of a venerated poet of the tribe of Aws:

"I will die, but there is no shame in death for a young man, if what he pursues is right and he strives as a muslim."

"If I live, I will not regret, and if I die, I will not suffer; let it be enough for you to live in humiliation and be reviled"

سَأْمِضِي وَمَا بِالْمَوْتِ عَارٌ عَلَيَّ
الْفَتَى إِنْ مَا نَوَى مَقًا وَجَاهِدًا
مُسْلِمًا فَإِنْ عِشْتُ لَمْ أُنْدَمَ وَإِنْ
مِيتَ لَمْ أَلَمَّ كَفَى بِكَ ذِكْرًا
أَنْ تَعِيشِي وَتُرَغَمَا

(Balaghul Husain)

Imam Husain (A.S.) made water available to quench the extreme thirst of Hur and his men despite the fact that they poised as his enemy to abstract his way. The water was also extended to their horses.

"And let the horses drink water to their full satisfaction" were the words of his command to his companions.

Thus the worthy son displayed generosity and humanity similar to what his father Ali (A.S.) had to the enemy in the battle of Siffin.

Again in his sermon addressed to his followers on the eve of his martyrdom, his following memorable words point to his supreme sense of valour and dignity:

"I do not see in death but salvation
and living together with oppressors is
nothing but humiliation and annoying"

إِنِّي لَا أَرَى الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا سَعَادَةً
وَالْحَيَاةَ مَعَ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا
بُرْمًا

By these sublime words,

(Balaghel Husain)

What the Imam meant was that life with real honour lies in absolute steadfastness on the noble principles of Islam. It cannot be compromised by bowing down and paying allegiance to a villain and despot, however fatal the course of action may be.

Whilst mourning tragedies that beset our Imams, let us recall their words of wisdom and high morals and endeavour to emulate their high ideals in our daily lives.