

Thirst! alas for Thirst

I am Sakina. To-day is Ashura, and this place is Karbala!

It may be one hour past noon, I am not sure. Since this morning the time has seemed to last like a whole life of suffering, especially the moments when father has been in action in the battle - field. Trying to look through the dust in the battle field to see what is happening and hearing the enemys' brawls. When father has been to fight, is hard, very hard!

The sound of drum and cymbal and the savage cries of the enemy make our hearts tremble with fear.

The air around is full of dust and the smell of the blood.

The heat of the sun over our heads is blazing and the earth beneath us scorching.

Thirst, O' thirst... our bodies burning with thirst! Our lips cracked like a dry desert. Our tongues so dry that they cleave to the roof of our mouths, and we are all looking so pale in the face because of thirst. Since yesterday the enemy has inched in on us. The army of my father, Imam Hossain, consists of seventy - two combatants only, while Yazid's army numbers tens of thousands.

Since this morning my father's friends have entered the

battle - field one by one, and have valiantly stood against that huge army. They have fought courageously. Each of them has killed tens of the enemy forces before being martyred himself.

Now, my father is the only one left to face the ungodly and savage pagans of the enemy.

I wish the distance between the tents and the field were not so far apart! So that I could see father fighting for God! I wish father had permitted me to accompany him!

Should a father engage in fighting a huge number of cruel enemies while his daughter stands aside with no news of him? From where I stand all that can be seen is a heavy cloud of dust, and all that can be heard is the shouts of uproar and tumult.

Yesterday I could clearly distinguish the wrinkles of extreme fatigue on my father's face. Thousands of people from Kufa and other cities had written letters to him promising to aid him if he rose against the tyrannical government of Yazid. But only seventy - two were very dear to him. My father once said to them:

«You are the best people of all times. I know of no one to have had better and devouter friends as you.»

All of us wept for the martyrdom of those dear friends, but father did not show any sign of grief at all. When my elder brother, Ali Akbar was knocked over from his horse, we nearly collapsed with grief, but father remained calm. When the enemy's arrow tore the throat of my younger brother, Ali Asghar, who was then in father's arms we cried to heaven, but father remained firm and steadfast. When the banner - bearer of our small army, the sentinel of the tents and water - carrier of Karbala, that is my uncle Abbass, fell off his horse with torn limbs, again father showed fortitude but said: 'My «back» is broken!'

When all the friends of father were martyred one by one

before his very eyes, he got ready to enter the field himself, but before doing so, he gathered together all the women and children, and said calmly:

«Now prepare yourselves for calamity and disaster, Remember that God is your protector and preserver and will soon save you from the evil of the enemies, and will grant you salvation. He will give your enemies terrible chastisements, while He will bestow on you many blessings in return for suffering so many calamities. Therefore, do not utter any complaints, and say nothing to diminish your real worth.»

We realized that father's martyrdom was certain. I inquired from him: «Father, are you submitting yourself to death?» and then fell into a profound grief crying bitterly. I did not wish to show any sign of weakness, but I could not help myself. Everyone was restless and worried. Even my aunt, Zeynab, tried to console us and at the same time wiped her tears.

Father embraced me and said: «Light of my eyes! How can a person, who has no more friends left for him, not submit to death?» I moaned and said: «To whom do you entrust us?» Father wiped my tears off with his hands and lips, and kissed my tearful eyelashes and said: «To God, I entrust you to His aid and favour which will be with you in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore be patient towards what God wills, and make no complaint, my girl; for, the world ends but the hereafter remains eternal.»

I made no complaints, nor did show any ingratitude, but still continued to weep. How could I stop crying when my father, the best of fathers in the world, was about to enter the battle field to combat thousands all by himself?

He said farewell to everyone, stroked the heads of the children, spoke some words to my aunt which we did not hear, and then asked her to bring him an old shirt.

We were surprised at this request and asked: «An old

shirt?»

He said: «The enemy is unmanly, and after killing me they will remove and seize my garments as spoils of war, So I wish to wear this old shirt under -neath so that I would not be naked in death.»

Father was preparing himself in a way as if he was going to a magnificent feast. He put on his clothes, and fastened his chainmail and sword. Then he wiped off the sweat on his brow with the corner of his turban, and stroked his greying beard and arranged it neatly. Then steadfastly he went towards his horse in order to charge the mass of the enemies. An enemy; savage, cruel, immoral and beastly.

No one could check his firm and decisive departure. Even if he did not go forth, the enemy would rush upon his tent. So it was far better that he should make a manly charge at the heart of the enemy's forces and fight them gallantly. No one could stop him from going forth; for, he had already predicted his martyrdom and had declared that with his martyrdom the religion of Islam would survive and remain steadfast. No one could persuade him: «Dear Father! Don't go!», «Dear uncle! Don't go!», «Dear brother! Don't go!» For, he was an Imam for all of us, and everyone knew that he did everything by the order of God.

But everybody wished to see him even it be for one more moment, and talk to him and hear his words.

My aunt, Zeynab, who was looking at him with tearful eyes, cried out: «Go gently, dear brother, go far more gently than ever!»

Father looked back and once more glanced at the group of weeping and anxious women and children. anyone but he would have shown hesitation in going, and his steps would have been weakened with the heart - rending cries of the women and children. But there was no hesitation or weakness

in father's faith and, determination. He waved an affectionate hand at us, entrusted us to God, and went towards his horse. And this was too little for me who would be losing such a fine father in a moment. So, I rushed towards his horse before he could see me.

My father sat firmly on his horse, ready to go. But the horse did not move, since my hands were put tightly round the horse's legs. The horse was starting at me and seemed to keep me company in shedding tears.

Father was surprised at the unexpected halt of his horse, and his astonishment doubled when he noticed that I held firmly to the horse's legs and did not allow it to move.

He dismounted and embraced me, wiping my tears, and said: «My girl! Light of my eyes!» I said: «Father! When Moslem was martyred, you took his daughter in your arms and caressed her. If you go who will there be to caress me?»

Tears gathered in my father's eyes, and with a broken heart and a breast full of grief, he murmured: «My Sakīna! my girl! Don't cry.»

You will weep much after I am killed. But now I am still alive, and so long as there is a spirit in my body, do not burn my heart with your tears. Yes, after my departure, you who are the best girl in the world, have the right to weep more than others!»

I knew that what I was going to say was not possible, but any how I said: «Dear father! take me back to Madina near the shrine of our grand father, the prophet.»

Father through his kind eyes looked at the enemy and said: «You see, my girl, that it is not possible.»

The brawls of the enemy rose very high, and father must be going to the battlefield.

I still felt the cracked lips of father on my cheeks, when I saw him galloping fast towards the enemy.

Now we could hear the clashes of the swords, the neighing of the horses and the wild cries of the enemy in the battlefield. We were standing by our tents horrified and trembling violently.

Alas! It looks as if it is my father's riderless horse that is coming towards us. His head and mane are covered with blood! Is this the echo of my groans, or those of Fatima or Roghia in the air?».