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Subject: A Critical Assessment of Imam Hussein's Martyrdom

Nationality: Egyptian/ Major: Sociology

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Najmih Zuhreh: Shi'ah/Sunni relationships in the past have not been in a fashion for us to be able to regard them as analyzable in all respects. Undoubtedly, some prejudices throughout history have led these two sects to horrible contradictions, while they could and still can enjoy a happy religious life together by continuous revisions and a sound intellectual coordination upon basic joint positions.

This issue has numerous sides that cannot all be discussed thoroughly in one or two hours. Thus, I would like to ask your view on the necessity of a logical utilization of the story of Imam Hussein (PBUH) by all Islamic denominations.

Ja'fari: Regarding the depth and significance of this story, as well as its underlying motives and consequences, we must accept that the tragic event of Karbala has lessons for all humanity, not merely for Shi'ah and Sunni people. As historical records demonstrate, Imam Hussein's martyrdom had been motivated by neither wealth nor office, since if he had indeed submitted himself to Yazid, he would easily have reached these both without any further difficulty. By reviewing the Imam's words on his departure from Medina until the last minutes of his life, you will undoubtedly conclude that his only goal and motive was saving the true Islam and the lofty principles of humanity that were then exposed to annihilation.

Najmih Zuhreh: In your view, what has been the main obstacle before the fulfillment of a necessary and sufficient analysis of this event, while the logic of divine religion and the ideal principles of humanity required the tragic event of Karbala to have been frequently analyzed and interpreted by anthropologists and those scholars who carry out research on the evolution of human morality?

Ja'fari: This majestic human movement and uprising should have been thoroughly researched by the members of the Islamic family, and then

the outcomes of this research could have been communicated and propagated by other scholars.

Najmih Zuhreh: What has in your view impeded this not to happen until this day?

Ja'fari: It must be taken into consideration that it is not so that Imam Hussein's constructive movement has not been studied by Moslem scholars at all, but as you know, some remarkable works have been authored in this regard by both Shi'ah and Sunni thinkers. However, there is still much that needs to be done. Unfortunately, sectarian prejudices and clashes have not allowed us to reach a serious agreement for scoring a deep understanding of Imam Hussein's figure and his sacrifices. Consequently, we have not succeeded in achieving a dependable knowledge of different political, social, moral and cultural aspects of this great event.

Unfortunately, this very obstacle has gravely hindered non-Moslem scholars from accomplishing an exact study and an understanding of this humane movement; nonetheless, we should not forget the influence of phenomena such as utilitarianism and authoritarianism that have lately lured them.

Now that we [Shi'ah and Sunni Moslems] confess to the vital importance of the tragic event of Karbala, we must take out the facts of this event from the pages written on the history of Islam and discuss them in our historical, political, religious and moral textbooks in a serious way. As you know, amongst other convincing and authorized reasons, by means of holding intellectual debates on this unique sacrificial event, we can simultaneously demonstrate the seriousness of "origin", "return" and "human transcendental commitment" in answering the basic questions, which are: Who am I? Whither have I come? Why have I come? Where shall I return to?

I assume you will agree with me that we will not find any single sacrifice in the total course of human history to have been made in the wake of the lofty motive and goal that caused Imam Hussein (PBUH) to undergo through such tortures and hardships. This truth can be clearly substantiated by the Imam's words and objective deeds for the realization of "the right of a descent life", "the right of inherent dignity", "the right of committed freedom", and "the right of equality before laws".

For example, we can allude to the observation of liberal-mindedness and toleration by Imam Hussein (PBUH) in the hardest times when every human individual sacrifices everything to his life. During this meaningful movement, Imam Hussein did not add anyone to his

forces by "compulsion";¹ as a matter of fact, he continuously insisted that no one was obliged to endanger his life for his sake. In some cases, he has explicitly stated:

This massive enemy you see does not have any objective but my murder. You are free to go! Since these drunken beasts could not surrender me to the tyrant despot of the time, they have surrounded us, as you see. I regard human dignity higher than a wretched life even if it is an eternal one. These deceived people have targeted your human dignity, so I shall not compel you to stay in this blood-thirsty wilderness.

As a sociologist, you can study this tragic event from the perspective of human dignity as a social phenomenon. It is not so hard to imagine that when Imam Hussein (PBUH) invites his evil and blood-thirsty enemies in that scorching desert to be open-minded and decent in their lives and persuadingly recommends them, "If you do not believe in any religion and or the truth of eternity and resurrection, at least you can live as a liberal-minded man in the world", he stands on the uppermost point of all ages and promotes the worthiest reformation with utmost seriousness, since liberality and being a liberal man has its own respective rules that should be observed by all individuals.

It seems that, to have a deep understanding of the objectives and ideals of both opposing parties (the Right and the Wrong), we should suffice it to evaluate the claims and arguments of the opposing parties – Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his disciples and Yazid and his followers – from a critical point of view.

The wicked followers of Yazid were to satisfy their animal desires through slaying the highest ideals of humanity; indeed, they believed that their commander Yazid would help them in this path. The disciples of Imam Hussein (PBUH), on the other hand, had a decent claim: "We want to promote human principles and rules, and not only do we not intend to trample on them in order to have an abundant natural life, but we are also ready to sacrifice our lives for their promotion." The necessity of the acquisition of such a lesson for humanity is far too clear to need to be demonstrated by ordinary arguments, only if man is interested in a purposeful life.

1- It is needless to say that Imam Hussein's ideal uprising is something different than the official defence of a nation's homeland, in which every competent citizen must be mobilized to take part in the defence.