

Like a dove I fly towards you – Visiting Karbala - Part 4

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As for Karbala.. What can I say? Nothing can do this experience justice. On the day we departed to Karbala, we got off the coach a few hours walk before the harams of Abul Fadel's (as) and Imam Hussain's (as) shrines. We took off our shoes, in tribute to Sayeda Zainab, and began our walk, barefoot. On the way there, I pondered much. I had heard so much of this place every year of my life. In fact my whole life had revolved around this place. I had always wondered what it would be like, how it would feel to be there. A poem recited by Helali in memory of Imam Hussain (as) would go through my mind, which I would come back to often.

He would say;

'Who said going to Karbala is a fantasy? Every breath I take is a dua asking for that opportunity.. That I may see Karbala's path while I am in youth. In my chest I have no tranquility. Anguish has become my only situation. My thoughts have given me no rest, driven to insanity wanting to see you. Your Haram has become my every thought and fantasy. My heart is without rest for your Karbala...'

I would remember these words, and so much more. The man I was named after, the one whom I base my life upon, the son of the Prophet Muhammad (sawa), I was going to meet. What would I say? Karbala is a different place to Najaf. In Najaf you feel emotional, but somewhat happy to be with your Imam. In Karbala, you just want to cry.

A story was told to me whilst I was abroad that really pierced me. There is an Urdu poet, whom is famous for reciting poetry for the Ahlulbayt. Towards the end of one of his recitations, he spoke of a recent accident he had. 5 months prior, he had gotten into a car accident, after which he fell into a coma. In this coma, he saw Bibi Rabab, the wife of Imam Hussain (as) and mother of Ali-Al Asghar (as), the 6 month old child of the Imam, who when Imam requested water for, the enemy soldiers shot arrows at him and pierced the baby's neck.

This poet asked Bibi Rabab who she was, and she told him. He asked her 'where am I, and what has happened to Barzakh? Why am I in this state.. it doesn't seem like Barzakh?'

She replied 'because I have asked for you to go back'.

'Why?' He asked.

She said 'You recite poetry for my family, and there is a line you recited about my baby that I want the whole world to hear, I want you to go back and spread this line of poetry' 'I have recited many lines of poetry for the baby of Hussain (as), which line is it that you are

referring to?’

She told him ‘it is the line in which you say, that when the 3 headed arrow had pierced my son’s neck, there was more blood than the milk he had drank from me in his entire life.’...

As we reached closer, there was one more turn we would take and Abbas’s (as) shrine would be in sight, very close.

We stopped before this turn. Sayed Ammar took the Microphone. He spoke of this man. The one whom went to fetch water for the children, the destroyer of the enemies of Islam, the gentle lion, the son of Ali (as), he who referred to himself and his half brothers Hassan (as) and Hussain (as) when saying ‘I am the son of Ali (as) and they are the sons of Muhammad (sawa), and it is the duty of the sons of Ali (as) to protect the sons of Muhammad (sawa)’. This man, who despite having an arm cut off, still remained steadfast bearing the flag. His other arm cut off, he remained on his way to the camps with the water for the children. It took an arrow in his eye, a blow to the head, and the most painful hit was the arrow into the bottle of water, which stopped him. Even though he was deprived of water just like his family for 3 days, he never drank any that he was carrying, as he wanted to wait for his loved ones to drink first. He never called Imam his brother, he would only call him master. He would not accept being in the lap of his Imam before he died, as he knew his brother would not have a lap to lay in within the next few hours. And his final request was not to be shown to his niece of whom he had gone to get water for as she screamed of her thirst, as he felt embarrassed of her not to have come back with water, despite what he went through. This young daughter of Hussain (as), when she realised her uncle was in trouble, told her father she was not thirsty anymore, and she just wanted her uncle to come back.. Sayed Ammar recited these famous stories to us, leaving everyone in tears. Then he said the words I will never forget. He said ‘for many of you, this is your first time here. For many of you, turning this corner and walking towards Abal Fadl (as) will be the greatest honor you will receive in your lifetime.’

We turned the corner, and I saw the shrine. I immediately prayed for my friends when I witnessed how close we were, and most of all for the return of Imam AlZaman (aj). We kept walking, to chants of Labayk Ya Hussain, Labayk Ya Abbas, as the residents of Karbala would look on at the newest group of zowar to visit their holy city. We entered into the mosque, and after ziyara and latom, I went to visit this great personality. To hold onto the shrine of Abbas (as), I felt unworthy. I spoke to him. I told him of all the times he had motivated me, and how my 11 year old brother always talks about him. I spoke whatever was in my heart, as if it were a conversation.

As we came out of the mosque, I still hadn’t looked up. As soon as I did, I saw that dome. The

dome of Hussain (as). I remember pausing right there, trying to take in exactly what I was about to do. I continued to walk. We stood outside once we reached it. Everyone was crying, yet I wasn't. I was just, overwhelmed. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hilli led us inside, and recited what happened to Imam Hussain (as). Everyone cried louder, I still hadn't cried. I was still overwhelmed. Looking around, I could not believe where I was. Buried here is Ali Al-Asghar (as) on Imam's chest, and Ali Al-Akbar (as) at the Imam's feet. Is this really the place? Have I really been called here? Is my master truly a few meters away from me? I got up, and first looked at the place where the beheading took place. The imagery began to take shape in my mind. I then went to visit the shrine.. 'Like a dove I fly towards you'. As my eyes laid upon it, and my small, slow steps brought me closer, I started to further comprehend what I was doing, and that I am there. My hands were close to the metal bars separating me and the grave of my Imam, my fingers hesitant to touch them. My hand hovered over the bars, trembling, until I grabbed the bar and held on with all my love. It felt as if a sudden spark of electricity, inspiration, had just rushed through my body. This is when I screamed to him 'I am here! I have come! I am here, I am here!!'..

I broke down, overwhelmed. Completely broke down. I was wailing like a baby. It was such a confusing feeling, I didn't know what was happening. I would walk in, and then out, and in again. My hands on my head, crying. A friend grabbed me and hugged me, and my cries grew louder as he patted my head. As I looked around, I could see everyone's emotions climaxing. You could not differ between first timers like me experiencing similar feelings, and those who have come to visit the Imam before. I would remember that poem again; 'They say under your dome is heaven'.. I kissed the floor. I was there. When leaving, we walked out backwards, hands on our chests, tears of diamonds in our eyes, conveying our salams. I was there. My few days in Karbala will be with me for the rest of my life. When you walk around the town, you can picture the events in your mind. The tents, the arms of Abbas (as), the river Euphrates, which was especially emotional and hard to walk away from – I had to be dragged away. We would have about 3 lectures a day, my favorites of which would start around midnight, and then be followed by hours of poetry, sometimes until fajr, recited by the amazing .voices of Ali Fadhil, Mohamedabbas Karim, and Ali Safdar. This would happen, every night