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Imam Husayn (a.s.)'s halt at the ground of Karbala, Umar bin Sa'ad's entry, and the circumstances therein

When Imam Husayn (a.s.) stopped at the plain of Karbala, (Kamil) he inquired as to what was the name of the place. People replied that the place was known as "Aqar." Imam said,

"Almighty Allah! We seek your refuge from Aqar" (Aqar means barren, sterile).

Sibt ibn Jawzi has written in his Tazkirah, that Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked as to what was the name of the place. They replied that it was Karbala and was also called Ninawa, which was a village therein. Then Imam started weeping and said: Umm Salama has informed me, that one day Jibra'eel came to the presence of Prophet Muhammad (S), and you (Imam Husayn) were with me. Suddenly the Prophet said, "Leave my child", hearing this I left you and the Prophet made you sit on his lap. Jibra'eel asked him, "Do you cherish this child"?

The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Then Jibra'eel said, "Your Ummah will kill him, and if you desire I shall show you the earth of the place where he shall be martyred." The Prophet showed his willingness to do so. Then Jibra'eel spread his wings towards Karbala and showed the Prophet the place.

Thus when Imam Husayn (a.s.) was told that the name of the place was Karbala, he smelt the earth and said,

"This is the same place regarding which Jibra'eel had informed the Prophet, and I shall be killed herein."

Then Sibt ibn Jawzi relates from Sha'bi, that when Imam Ali (a.s.) was proceeding towards Siffin, he came face to face with Ninawa, which was a village near the river Euphrates. Imam halted there and

commanded his companion, who had the job of providing water for ablutions that,

“Tell me the name of this place.”

He replied that it was called Karbala. Hearing this he wept bitterly until the earth became wet with his tears. Then he said,

“One day I went to the presence of the Holy Prophet (S) when he was weeping and asked him as to what made him weep.”

He replied,

“At this moment Jibra’eel came to me and informed me that my son Husayn will be killed at a place called Karbala near the river Euphrates. Then Jibra’eel lifted a handful of earth and gave it to me, I smelt it, thus I could not control my tears.”

Furthermore it is related in Biharul Anwar from Kharaej, that Imam Muhammad al Baqir (a.s.) says, that one day Imam Ali (a.s.) went out with his companions one or two miles away from Karbala. Then he advanced further until he reached a place called Maqdafan and started wandering there. Then he said,

“Two hundred Prophets and the progeny of the Prophets have been martyred at this place, and this the halting station, the place of martyrdom of the felicitous martyrs, which has not been acquired by the ancient, while those after them shall not reach it too.”

(Malhoof) When Imam Husayn (a.s.) reached that place, he asked as to what was the name of that place. People replied that it was called Karbala. Imam said,

“O Allah! I seek your refuge from Karb (Grief) and Bala (trials)”

Then he said,

“Grief and trial dwells herein, hence alight down, and this is our halting place. Here will our blood be shed and here shall we be buried. My Grandfather, the Prophet of Allah (S) has foretold me regarding it.”

Everyone complied to his order and dismounted, while Hurr too pitched his tents with his companions at another place.

(Kashful Ghummah) Everyone complied to his orders and dismounted and off-loaded their equipments, while Hurr dismounted his army opposite Imam Husayn (a.s.). Then Hurr wrote to Ubaydullah informing him that Imam Husayn (a.s.) had halted at Karbala.

It is stated in Murujuz Zahab, that Imam Husayn (a.s.) proceeded towards Karbala accompanied by five hundred horsemen and around a hundred on foot from his family and companions.

It is related in Biharul Anwar from Manaqib that Zuhayr bin Qayn said, "Take us along, so that we may halt at Karbala near the bank of the river Euphrates, and we shall halt there. Then if they fight us, we shall fight them and seek help from Allah." Tears rolled down the eyes of Imam and he said,

"O Allah! I seek your refuge from Karb (grief) and Bala (trials)."

Imam settled therein and Hurr dismounted too facing him with a thousand soldiers. Then Imam ordered that pen and paper should be brought and he wrote a letter to the affable chiefs of Kufa:

"From Husayn bin Ali, to Sulayman bin Surad, Musayyab bin Najabah, Rufa'ah bin Shaddad, Abdullah bin Wa'al and the group of believers. Now then! You very well know that the Holy Prophet in his lifetime said that the one who witnesses a cruel and oppressive ruler... (till the end as narrated, which has been related earlier in context of his sermon delivered in the presence of his companions and that of Hurr's.)"

Then he folded the paper and affixing his seal over it, handed it over to Qays bin Mushir Saydawi ... (till the end, which has already been related earlier.)

When he received the news of the Martyrdom of Qays, tears flowed from his eyes and he said,

"O Allah! Assign an exalted station for me and my followers (Shi'ah) near You. And assemble us into the place of repose of Your Mercy, for You have power over all"

Then one of the companions from among the followers (Shi'ah) viz. Hilal bin Nafe' Bajali¹ leapt forward and said, "O son of the Prophet of Allah! Your grandfather, the Prophet of Allah (S), could not force his affection into the hearts of all men, nor could he bring people to his command, for there were hypocrites among them, who would say that they would assist him but in their hearts intended to deceive him.

Their attitude was sweeter than honey in his presence and behind his back they were bitter than Colocynth, until the Almighty Allah summoned the Prophet to Himself. And your father was similar to him. A group of people united to assist him but later he had to fight the Nakeseen, the oppressive Qaseteen and the perverse Mareqeen.²

Then the end of Imam Ali (a.s.) came and he proceeded towards the bliss of Paradise. And now today those with us are similar to those people of that day. And the people have not broken off the pledge and the allegiance, except that they have done loss to none other than their own selves, and Allah has made us independent of them. You may, with sobriety and welfare, take us to whichever place you desire, whether it be in the east or the west. By Allah! We do not fear the decree of Allah, nor do we despise His meeting. We shall take the opportunity with our determination and sightedness, and will befriend your friends and will bear enmity with your enemies."

Then Burayr bin Khuzayr Hamadani arose and said, "By Allah! O son of the Prophet of Allah (S)! Allah has graced us through you that we may be cut to pieces in front of you and on the day of Qiyamah your Grandfather would intercede for us. The one who has betrayed the grandson of their own Prophet, shall

not find salvation. Fie upon them for what they shall see tomorrow in Qiyamah, and shall groan and wail in (the fire of) hell.”

Then Imam Husayn (a.s.) gathered his sons, brothers, relatives around him and wept for some time and said,

“O Allah! We are the progeny of Your Prophet. These people have dragged us out of our houses and have driven us and have constrained us from the place of our Grandfather (Madina). The Bani Umayyah have oppressed us. O Allah! Take away our rights from them and help us over these tyrants.”

Then he proceeded from there and on Wednesday or Thursday entered Karbala on the second of Muharram 61 A.H. Then he turned towards his companions and said,

“People are the slaves of this world and Religion is only a lip-service for them, and they will take care of it until it is pleasurable, and when the crucible of trials approaches, only a few religious ones remain.”

Then he asked,

“Is this place Karbala?”

The people replied in the affirmative. He said,

“This is the place of grief and trials and this is the place of the resting of our Camels, our halting place, station of our martyrdom and where our blood shall be spilled.”

Then they dismounted there, and Hurr accompanied with a thousand men too alighted facing him. Then he wrote to Ubaydullah bin Ziyad saying that Husayn had encamped at Karbala.

Ubaydullah bin Ziyad’s letter to Imam Husayn (a.s.)

“Now then O Husayn! I have been informed that you have halted at Karbala. Yazid has written to me not to recline my head on the bed and not be satiated until I send you to Allah, or you submit yourself to me and Yazid bin Mu’awiyah. Greetings.”

When his letter reached Imam Husayn (a.s.), he read it and threw it away saying,

“The one who seeks the pleasure of people against the displeasure of Allah can never succeed.”

The messenger asked him the reply for the letter, to which Imam said,

“He has no reply, but has the wrath (of Allah).”

When the messenger reached Ubaydullah and conveyed the Imam’s message to him, he was infuriated and looked towards Umar bin Sa’ad and appointed him to fight with Imam Husayn (a.s.). Before that

Ubaydullah had given the governorship of Ray to Umar bin Sa'ad, thus when Umar excused himself, Ubaydullah told him to return the post bestowed upon him. Umar asked for respite and thereafter agreed in fear of the governorship being taken away from him.

The author says that this (Umar bin Sa'ad's excuse to Ubaydullah not to fight) seems unlikely to me. The reliable biographers and historians have mutually agreed that Umar bin Sa'ad reached Karbala one day after Imam Husayn (a.s.) entered therein, and it was the day of third of Muharram (thus it proves that he was prepared for it from the very beginning).

Shaikh Mufeed, Ibn Aseer and others relate that Umar bin Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas left Kufa towards Karbala the next day accompanied by an army of four thousand horsemen. Ibn Aseer says that the reason of Umar bin Sa'ad going to Karbala, was that Ubaydullah bin Ziyad had sent him on duty to Dashti, with a well-equipped army of four thousand, for the people of Daylam had gained control over it and secondly that Ubaydullah had given him authority over Ray. Umar bin Sa'ad had made Hammamul A'ayan as his encampment.

When the matter of Imam Husayn (a.s.) reached here, Ubaydullah called Umar bin Sa'ad and said, "Go and confront Husayn and after accomplishing our task, return back to your position." Umar bin Sa'ad tried to excuse himself when Ubaydullah said, "Very well, then you may return back what has been conferred upon you."

When Ubaydullah said this Umar replied, "Give me respite for today so that I may take a decision", saying this he left and asked the opinion of his well-wishers, all of whom advised him to refrain from it. His nephew Hamza bin Mugheera bin Sha'bah came to him and said, "I request you in the name of Allah not to confront Husayn, for by doing this you will be sinning and severing the bonds of relationship with him. By Allah! Even if you have to leave this world, the wealth and the kingdom upon the earth, it is better for you than go to the presence of the Almighty Allah with the blood of Husayn upon your neck."

Umar replied that he would not do so and he spent the entire night pondering upon it saying, "Could I decline the governorship of Ray, while it is my dream, or should I return back blamed for killing Husayn? Should I kill him, then I will wind up in the hell from which there is no escape, while the governorship of Ray is the refreshment of my eyes."

Then he returned to Ubaydullah and said, "You have deputed me for this task and all the people have heard it. If you desire send me for this job, otherwise send someone else against Husayn from the noblemen of Kufa, who would be better than me", then he named some of them. Ubaydullah replied, "If I have to send someone else I will not ask your opinion, then now if you are ready to go to Karbala with the command over our army, do so, or else return back the post which we have conferred upon you." Hearing this Umar replied, "I myself will go", saying this he proceeded until he encamped opposite Imam Husayn (a.s.).

The author says that what Imam Ali (a.s.) had predicted came out to be true. Sibti ibn Jawzi in his

Tazkirah relates that the eminence of Imam Ali (a.s.) became apparent here. One day he met Umar bin Sa'ad, who was a young lad at that time, and said,

“Woe be to you O son of Sa’ad! What would be your state at the moment when you will be standing between Paradise and hell and you shall choose the hell.”

When Umar reached Karbala, he halted at Ninawa.

(Irshad) When Umar bin Sa'ad reached Karbala, he called Urwah bin Qays Ahmasi and said, “Go to Husayn and ask him as to why he has come here and what he desires.” He replied that he was ashamed to go, for he was among those who had written to the Imam inviting him to come. Then when Umar put the same offer to whomsoever in his army, they all refused, for they were among those who had written to Imam. Then Kaseer bin Abdullah Sha'abi, who was a brave man and would never turn his face away from any task, arose and said, “I shall go and if you desire I shall kill him.”

Umar replied, “I do not desire his murder, then go to him and ask him the reason as to why he has come here.” Kaseer went until Abu Samamah Saedi saw him and said, “May Allah reconcile you O Aba Abdillah! The man is coming towards you, who is the worst among the dwellers of this world and who is the boldest and who had shed the most blood among them.”

Then Abu Samamah himself arose and went up to him and told him to keep his sword down. He refused to do so and said, “I am only a messenger, then if you desire, I shall convey it to you or else I shall return back.” Abu Samamah said, “In that case I shall keep my hand over the hilt of your sword then you may deliver your message.” He said, “No, I shall not let your hand reach there.” Abu Samamah said, “Then deliver your message to me and I shall convey it to Husayn, but I shall not let you go to him for you are a wicked man.” Then they started abusing one another until Kaseer returned back to Umar bin Sa'ad and informed him.

Umar called for Qurrah bin Qays Hanzali and said, “Woe be to you! Go to Husayn and ask him as to why he has come here and what he desires.” When Imam saw Qurrah he asked,

“Does anyone know this man?”

Habib bin Mazahir replied, “Yes, he is from the Hanzala clan of Tameem, and is the son of our sister. I had known him to be a believer and had never thought that he would come here like this.” Qurrah came and saluted the Imam and delivered the message of Umar. Imam replied,

“The people of your town have written to me and requested me to come here. Then if you hate my presence I shall return back.”

Then Habib bin Mazahir said, “Woe be to you O Qurrah! Are you returning back to the oppressive ones? Then assist this man because of whose Fathers Allah will favor you.” Qurrah replied, “I shall return back and convey Imam's message to Umar and think over it.” He returned back and conveyed to Umar what

Imam had told him. Then Umar said, "I hope that Allah will spare me from fighting him."

Then he wrote to Ubaydullah: "In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful. Now then! When I reached my destination, I sent a messenger towards Husayn asking him as to why he came here and what he desired. He replied that the people of this town had written to him and sent messengers inviting him, hence he has come here. He says that if these people do not like my presence and have turned against their words, which were conveyed to me by their messengers, I shall return back." Hassan bin A'ez Asabi says, that I was present there when Umar's letter reached Ubaydullah. When Ubaydullah read the letter, he said, "When he has got trapped in our claws, he hopes to escape, now there is no escape."

Then he wrote back to Umar bin Sa'ad: "Now then! I have received your letter, and I have understood whatever you have written therein. Offer a proposal to Husayn that he and his companions should take the pledge of allegiance to Yazid. Then if he does so, we shall see what is to be done. Greetings." When Umar received the letter he said, "I had feared that Ubaydullah would not seek fairness."

Muhammad bin Abi Talib says, that Umar bin Sa'ad did not convey this proposal of Ubaydullah bin Ziyad to Imam Husayn (a.s.), for he knew that the Imam would never pledge his allegiance to Yazid. Then Ubaydullah ordered all men to gather at the great mosque of Kufa. Then he came out, mounted the pulpit and said, "O people! You have very well tested the family of Abu Sufyan, and you have found them such as you desired them (to be). This is the commander of the faithful Yazid, who is well-behaved, a person with a pleasant countenance and kind to his subjects. He bestows rights upon everyone and the roads are safe in his kingdom. And similar was his father Mu'awiyah in his own time. And after him his son Yazid too respects the slaves of Allah and makes them rich with wealth and honors them. He has increased your rights by a hundred times and has commanded me to increase it further and prepare you to fight his enemy Husayn. Then listen to him and obey his orders." Saying this he alighted the pulpit and distributed abundant gifts among people and dispatched them to assist Umar bin Sa'ad against Husayn.

(Manaqib) Ubaydullah started dispatching troops to Karbala until twenty thousand horsemen (Malhoof) gathered with Umar bin Sa'ad till the sixth of Muharram. (Tasleeyatul Majalis) Then Ubaydullah sent someone to Shabas bin Raba'ee saying, "Come to me so that I may dispatch you to fight Husayn." He pretended to be sick and excused himself.

Ubaydullah sent him a letter stating: "Now then! My messenger has informed me that you pretend to be sick, and I fear lest you be one of those who

"when they meet with those who believe, they say 'we believe', but when they go apart to their devils, they say, 'surely we are with you, verily we did but mock'" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 14)

Then if you persist in our obedience, hasten to come to us."

Shabas came after the Prayers of Isha, so that Ubaydullah may not see his face, which was free of any illness. When Shabas came, Ubaydullah welcomed him and made him sit near him and said, "I desire that you go to fight that man (Husayn) and thus assist Umar bin Sa'ad." Shabas replied that he would surely do so (Manaqib) and he dispatched him with an army of one thousand horse-men.

(Irshad, Tabari) Then Ubaydullah wrote to Umar bin Sa'ad: "Now then! Prevent Husayn and his companions from getting water. They should not get a single drop of water as was done with (Caliph) Usman bin Affan."

Umar bin Sa'ad immediately sent 'Amr bin Hajjaj with five hundred horse-men to go to the bank of the river Euphrates and block the supply of water for Imam and his companions. They did not allow them to take even a single drop of water, and that was three days before the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (i.e. the seventh of Muharram)

(Tabari) Ubaydullah bin Haseen Azdi, who was registered (in the army) of the clan of Bajila, called out in a loud voice (Irshad): "O Husayn! Do you see this water similar to the heavens? By Allah! You shall not taste even a drop of it until you perish of thirst." Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied,

"O Allah! Make him die of thirst and never forgive him."

Hameed bin Muslim says: By Allah! Later I visited him during his illness. By Allah, besides Whom there is no Deity, I saw him drinking water until it reached his stomach and he vomited it. Then he shouted "Thirst, thirst" and drank water until it reached his throat and he was never satiated, he remained in that state until he died (May Allah's curse be upon him).

1. The author in his note says that according to me the right name is Nafe' bin Hilal bin Nafe', while the historians have erroneously mentioned it as Hilal bin Nafe' because of the repetition of the name Nafe' as is quoted in Manhajul Maqal etc...

2. Nakeseen or the violators of oath, referred to by Imam Ali (a.s.) to the group who fought against him at Jamal, derived from the Qur'anic verse "So whoever violates his oath (nakasa), does violate it only to the injury of his (own) self" (Sura al Fath: 10). Qaseteen or the deviators, referred to by Imam Ali (a.s.) to the group who fought against him at Siffin, derived from the Qur'anic verse "And as for the deviators (Qasetoon), they shall be a fuel for the hell" (Sura al Jinn: 15). Mareqeen or those who missed the religion, referred to by Imam Ali (a.s.) to the group of Kharijites who fought against him at Naharwan, derived from a Prophetic Tradition.