

In Karbala

Imam al-Husayn (a) wanted to reside in a place near a spring or a shelter, but al-Hurr prevented him and recited Ubaydullah's message. As the situation reached its climax, Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn, one of the sincere companions of the Imam, suggested that they fight against al-Hurr and his troops, but the Imam (a) rejected this saying, "I will never begin the fighting."¹

Al-Hurr then obliged the Imam (a) to reside in a place, and the Imam (a) had to respond.

"What is this place called," asked the Imam (a).

"This is Karbala," answered one of the companions.

"O Allah: I seek Your protection against agony and ordeal," supplicated the Imam (a) with tearful eyes.²

He then turned towards his companions and said:

أَرْضُ كَرْبٍ وَبَلَاءٍ. هَا هُنَا مَنَاخُ رِكَابِنَا وَمَحَطُّ رِحَالِنَا وَسَفْكُ دِمَائِنَا.

This is the place of agony and ordeal. This is the place where we, as well as our riding animals, will reside and our blood will be shed.

Al-Abbas, accompanied by the heroes of the Prophet's household and the Imam's companions, hurried to pitch tents for the harem, headed by Lady Zaynab, who were experiencing horror as they imagined the events that were to come about on this land.

The Imam (a) then raised his hands upward for supplicating to Allah and said:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا عِتْرَةُ نَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، قَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا وَطُرِدْنَا وَأُزْعِمْنَا عَنْ حَرَمِ جَدِّنَا، وَتَعَدَّتْ بَنُو أُمِّيَّةَ عَلَيْنَا.
اللَّهُمَّ فَخُذْ لَنَا بِحَقِّنَا وَأَنْصِرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ.

O Allah: We, the household of Your Prophet Muhammad, have been banished away from the sanctum

of our grandfather and have been aggressed by the Umayyads. O Allah: Take vengeance upon those who oppressed us and support us against the wrongdoers.[3](#)

He then turned his face towards his household and companions and said:

إِنَّ هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ تَغَيَّرَتْ وَتَنَكَّرَتْ وَأَدْبَرَ مَعْرُوفُهَا، فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهَا إِلَّا صَبَابَةٌ كَصَبَابَةِ الْإِنَاءِ وَخَسِيسٌ عَيْشٌ كَالْمَرْعَى
الْوَيْبِلِ. أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ لَا يُعْمَلُ بِهِ وَأَنَّ الْبَاطِلَ لَا يُتَنَاهَى عَنْهُ؛ لِيَرْغَبَ الْمُؤْمِنُ فِي لِقَاءِ اللَّهِ مُحِقًّا. فَإِنِّي لَا أَرَى
الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا سَعَادَةً وَلَا الْحَيَاةَ مَعَ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا بَرَمًا. إِنَّ النَّاسَ عَبِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَالِدِّينَ لَعَقُّ عَلَى أَلْسِنَتِهِمْ يَحُوطُونَهُ مَا دَرَّتْ
مَعَانِسُهُمْ، فَإِذَا مَحَّصُوا بِالْبَلَاءِ قَلَّ الدِّيَانُونَ.

This world has changed, snubbed, and its good has turned tail. Nothing has remained from it except a thing that is as scanty as the leftover of a cup and a mean life that is like a noxious grazing. Have you not noticed that the right is ignored and the evil is not forbidden? This is sufficient for making the believers desire for meeting Allah rightfully. I do not see death but as happiness and do not consider life with the wrongdoers but as boredom. People are certainly slaves of this world. The religion is only a statement on their tongues. They change it however their livelihood demands. If they are examined by misfortunes, the religious will be very few.[4](#)

By these words, Imam al-Husayn (a) informed his household and companions about the coming ordeals they would face, and declared his readiness to fight against the wrongful party to the last spark of his life. As they heard his words, those unmatched individuals who paved the way of freedom to humankind through their unparalleled situations spoke before their leader to show him their readiness to participate and continue the way whatever the sacrifices would be. The first companion to speak was Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn:

“Son of Allah’s Messenger: We have understood your words. We may stop supporting you if we understand that this world will perpetuate for us for good... etc.”

Another hero, namely Burayr ibn Khudayr, said similar words. The other heroes declared their situations of perseverance on their principles and readiness to sacrifice their souls for their leader. The Imam (a) thanked them for their feelings and blessed them.

In Kufa, Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad felt happy when he was informed that the vanguards of his army seized Imam al-Husayn. He therefore began to plan for the next step; whom should he choose for the commandment of the army to kill the Prophet’s dearest one? As he reviewed the names of the candidates, he could not realize any individual meaner and more vicious than Umar ibn Saad.

At first, Umar refused to fight against the Imam (a), but Ubaydullah threatened he would dismiss him from the governorship of Ray – currently Tehran. Thus, he accepted and began his campaign towards Karbala with four thousand horsemen who joined the army of al-Hurr there. Umar ibn Saad was chosen for the most horrible crime, and he showed no blemish when he led armies to fight against the divinely

selected Imam. He surrounded the Imam (a) from every side, laid siege for him, and blocked all the ways in order to prevent anybody from joining or supporting him.

In Kufa again, Ubaydullah gathered people and spoke: “O People: As you tried the descendants of Abu Sufyan, you have found them as exactly as you like. You have also known your leader, Yazid, as good and praiseworthy man. He treats his subjects kindly, gives everybody his deserved share of the public treasury, and honors people out of his wealth. He has ordered me to give each of you one hundred dirhams monthly in addition to your fixed shares of the public treasury. He has also ordered me to call you to participate in the campaign against his enemy al-Husayn. Hence, you should listen to and obey him...”⁵

Unfortunately, most of them carried out these orders and composed a huge army against the Imam small group. Afterwards, they traveled to Karbala and occupied the two banks, as well as all the branches, of the River Euphrates.

Some historians, however, have mentioned that three days before the encounter, Imam al-Husayn (a) was deprived of water.⁶ This in fact was the most horrible misfortune he had to face. The strange thing is that the band of the Umayyad army took pride in this criminal act that challenged all humanitarian values. One of them, for instance, shouted at Imam al-Husayn (a), “Husayn: you can see water flow like reptiles. You will not taste it before you die...”⁷

Expressing his joy at this situation, Amr ibn al-Hajjaj addressed, “Husayn, this is the Euphrates. Dogs, donkeys, and even pigs are licking its water. But we shall prevent you from having a single drop from it...”⁸

No single law or code on this earth allows any person, under any circumstances, to deprive women and children of water except the laws of the Umayyad dynasty whose individuals, from the first spark of Islam, advised each other to prevent the Prophet’s household from holding any position of leadership.

Facing this ordeal of the scarcity of water, Lady Zaynab undertook the difficult mission of gathering the thirsty children and women and trying to comfort them and promise with water. Her heart melted away as she saw those children and babies cry out of thirst while she had nothing to give.

Imam al-Husayn (a) then asked Umar ibn Saad to meet him individually. The criminal came with his son and servant to the Imam (a) who asked his brother al-Abbas and his son Ali al-Akbar to attend that meeting. The Imam (a) then asked Umar to think about the matter more seriously and to anticipate the inescapable misfortunes that he would certainly face in this world and the world to come if he would fight against him. Umar however tried to tender his excuses, but the Imam (a) proved all of them worthless. Finally, the Imam (a) recognized that Umar would never change his mind; therefore, he said to him, “What is the matter with you? May Allah kill you on your bed! May Allah never forgive you on the day when you will be resurrected! I foresee that you, if you do it, will not even be able to satisfy your appetite from the wheat of Iraq.”

Mockingly, Umar answered, “It will be enough for me to have from its barley!”⁹

Indeed, Almighty Allah responded to the supplications of Imam al-Husayn concerning Umar: the soldiers of al-Mukhtar slew him in his bed.

In the land of Karbala, Lady Zaynab faced the progression of calamities with the weapon of patience and steadfastness. At the night of the ninth of Muharram, the Umayyad armies advanced towards Imam al-Husayn’s small group. The Imam (a) was about to take a nap when his sister, Lady Zaynab, hurried to him with horror after she had heard the sounds of the foes coming towards them. She woke him up to say, “Brother, the enemies are approaching us.” He answered, “I have just seen the Messenger of Allah, my father Ali, my mother Fatimah, and my brother al-Hasan in sleep and they told that I will join them very soon.”

These words acted as a thunderbolt on Lady Zaynab and tore her sensitive, tortured heart. She therefore had nothing to do but slapping her face, shouting, “Alas for this!” The Imam (a) tried to relieve her by saying, “Alas is not yours, sister. Please, be quiet. May the All-beneficent have mercy upon you.”¹⁰

Al-Abbas, who did not leave his brother for a single moment, turned his face to him and said, “They have come for you.” The Imam (a) asked him to verify their intents. He said to him, “May I sacrifice myself for you, brother! Ride on and meet them to ask about their intentions.”

With twenty horsemen, al-Abbas hurried towards that army and asked what they wanted.

“The governor has ordered us to call you to submit to his orders, otherwise we will fight you,” they answered.¹¹

Al-Abbas turned back to tell his brother about their intention. Meanwhile, Habib ibn Muzhahir delivered a sermon to that army; he admonished and warned them against the divine punishment they would face if they fought against the family of the Prophet (S). However, some of them answered him impudently.

When he heard the words of his brother, Imam al-Husayn said to him, “Go back to them and try your best to delay them until tomorrow morning so that we, on this night, will have time to pray to our Lord Who knows that I love praying to Him, reciting His Book, and supplicating to Him.”

Al-Abbas conveyed these words to the Umayyad army. Umar ibn Saad, because he feared that others would report his situation to the governor, offered the suggestion to Shimr who was his only competitor. He did not say anything, but Amr ibn al-Hajjaj intruded, “How strange this is! Even if they were from the non-Arabs, we would respond to their demand!”

In fact, Amr did not want to confess that their adversary party was the beloved grandson of the Prophet (S) and the Chief of the Youth of Paradise. This is because he anticipated that others would report any single word he would say to the ruling authorities.

As many others supported Amr's opinion, Umar ibn Saad accepted to postpone waging war against the camp of the Imam (a). He ordered one of his soldiers to approach the camp of the Imam (a) and declare that the fighting would be postponed to the next day.

Thus, the fighting was postponed for a night and Umar ibn Saad's army waited whether the Imam (a) would respond to them or fight.

The Imam gathered all his followers and gave a sermon:

أُتْنِي عَلَى اللَّهِ أَحْسَنَ الثَّنَاءِ وَأَحْمَدُهُ عَلَى السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ. اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَحْمَدُكَ عَلَى أَنْ أَكْرَمْتَنَا بِالنُّبُوَّةِ، وَعَلَّمْتَنَا الْقُرْآنَ، وَفَهَّمْتَنَا فِي الدِّينِ، وَجَعَلْتَ لَنَا أَسْمَاعاً وَأُفْنَئِدَةً، وَلَمْ تَجْعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ: فَإِنِّي لَا أَعْلَمُ أَصْحَاباً أَوْفَى وَلَا خَيْراً مِنْ أَصْحَابِي، وَلَا أَهْلَ بَيْتٍ أَبْرَّ وَلَا أَوْصَلَ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي. فَجَزَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِّي خَيْرًا. أَلَا وَإِنِّي لِأُظَنُّ أَنَّهُ آخِرُ يَوْمٍ لَنَا مِنْ هَوْلَاءِ. أَلَا وَإِنِّي قَدْ أَذْنْتُ لَكُمْ فَاَنْطَلِقُوا جَمِيعاً فِي جِلِّ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنِّي ذِمَامٌ. هَذَا اللَّيْلُ قَدْ غَشِيَكُمْ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ جَمَلًا. وَلِيَأْخُذْ كُلُّ رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ بِيَدِ رَجُلٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي وَتَفَرَّقُوا فِي سَوَادِ هَذَا اللَّيْلِ وَذُرُونِي وَهَوْلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يُرِيدُونَ غَيْرِي.

I praise Allah with the best words of praise and thank Him for good times and bad times. O Allah: I do praise You for You have honored us with prophecy, have taught us the Quran, have given us understanding of the religion, have conferred upon us with ears and hearts, and have not made us idol-worshippers.

Indeed, I do not know any followers better than my followers nor any family better than my family. May Allah reward you all. Indeed, I think tomorrow will be the decisive day with these people. I have allowed you all to leave me alone and go on your own way. During this night, any one of you may leave. Any of you may take one of my family and leave and you may scatter in the murk of this night. Indeed, I am the one they want. When they get me, they will not go after anyone else.[12](#)

As soon as the Imam (a) finished his words, Abul-Fadl Al-Abbas, representing the Ahl al-Bayt, said to his brother:

“Why should we do so? Is it for that we will live after you? No! We supplicate to the Lord to forbid it.”[13](#)

The same situation was shown from the sons of Aqil, and the other companions who showed their readiness to sacrifice their souls for their Imam (a). Hence, everybody spent that night with worship and acts of obedience to Allah. They were waiting for the dawn of that day on which they would obtain their highest goal in this life – martyrdom.

Lady Zaynab's panic

Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin (a), the only survivor of the tragedy of Karbala, later on reported:

My aunt Zaynab was nursing me on that night (the night before the tenth of Muharram) when my father isolated himself in a tent. Only Juwayn, the servant of Abu Dharr, was with him mending his sword. The Imam (a) then cited (the following poetic verses):

O days, fie upon you! How poor a mate you are!

Too many are those who, in morns and eves, are

Dead or alone in isolation

Yet days never change and never show alternation

Every mortal shall take a way to their termination

The inevitable shall imminently occur

All matters to the Most High recur.

He repeated these words twice or thrice until I understood his purpose. Hence, I could not control my tears. However, I tried my best to stop weeping and keep silence. I understood that we would suffer horrifying ordeals after him. My aunt Zaynab, like other women who are prevailed by their tender hearts, could not control herself. She ran towards him with uncovered head and shouted before him:

وَأُنْكَلَاهُ! وَأَحْزَنَاهُ! لَيْتَ الْمَوْتَ أَعْدَمَنِي الْحَيَاةُ! يَا حُسَيْنَاهُ! يَا سَيِّدَاهُ! يَا بَقِيَّةَ أَهْلِ بَيْتَاهُ! أَسْتَسَلَّمْتَ لِلْمَوْتِ وَيَسْتَتَ مِنْ
الْحَيَاةِ؟ الْيَوْمَ مَاتَ جَدِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، الْيَوْمَ مَاتَتْ أُمِّي فَاطِمَةُ الزَّهْرَاءُ وَأَبِي عَلِيُّ الْمُرْتَضَى وَأَخِي الْحَسَنُ الزَّكِيُّ. يَا
خَلِيفَةَ الْمَاضِينَ وَثِمَالَ الْبَاقِينَ.

Oh, for my losing you! Oh, for my grief for you! May demise deprive me of life! Oh, for al-Husayn! Oh, for my master! Oh, for the only remaining one of my family members! Is it true that you have submitted to death and despaired of life? Only this day have my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, my mother, Fatimah al-Zahra, my father, Ali al-Murtada (the Pleasèd One), and my brother, al-Hasan al-Zaki (the Pure) died. You are the successor of the bygone ones and the last of their survivors.”

Hearing these words from his beloved sister, Imam al-Husayn (a) looked at her and said:

يَا أُخْتَاهُ؛ لَا يَذْهَبَنَّ بِحِلْمِكَ الشَّيْطَانُ

O dear sister: do not let Shaitan seize your toleration.

The Imam's eyes overflowed with tears and he added, "After they had made me revolt, they wronged me."

She then shouted:

يَا وَبَلَّتَاهُ! أَتَغْتَصِبُ نَفْسَكَ اغْتِصَابًا؟ فَذَاكَ أَقْرَحُ لِقَلْبِي وَأَشَدُّ عَلَيَّ نَفْسِي.

Oh, woe! Do you take your soul by force? This is indeed more painful and more difficult for me to tolerate.

She then slapped her face, tore her cloth, and fell to the ground losing consciousness. The Imam (a) hurried to pour water on her face. When she regained consciousness, he consoled her with the following words:

يَا أَخْتَاهُ! اتَّقِي اللَّهَ وَتَعَزَّيْ بِعِزَاءِ اللَّهِ وَاعْلَمِي أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْأَرْضِ يَمُوتُونَ وَأَهْلَ السَّمَاءِ لَا يَبْقَوْنَ، وَأَنَّ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَ اللَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْخَلْقَ بِقُدْرَتِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ يَعُودُونَ، وَهُوَ فَرْدٌ وَاحِدٌ. وَإِنَّ أَبِي خَيْرٌ مِنِّي، وَأَخِي خَيْرٌ مِنِّي، وَلِكُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ.

يَا أَخْتَاهُ، إِنِّي أَقْسَمْتُ عَلَيْكَ فَأَبْرِي قَسَمِي: لَا تَشُقِّي عَلَيَّ جَيْبًا، وَلَا تَحْمِشِي عَلَيَّ وَجْهًا، وَلَا تَدْعِي عَلَيَّ بِالْوَيْلِ وَالتُّبُورِ إِذَا أَنَا هَلَكْتُ.

O dear sister: Fear Allah, console yourself with the solace from Allah, and know that inhabitants of this earth shall inexorably die and the inhabitants of the heavens shall not survive forever. Also, be it known to you that everything shall perish except Almighty Allah Who has created all the creatures out of His omnipotence and they all shall return to Him. He is Single and the Only One. My father is better than I am and my brother is better than I am, and every Muslim must take an example from the Messenger of Allah (S).

O dear sister: I put you under this oath and please do not break it: never tear a piece of your cloth (as a sign of your sadness for me), never slap your face (for mourning at my death), and never invoke woe and perdition when I will be slain.

Imam al-Husayn (a), then, accompanied her to my tent.

To the companions of the Imam (a), that night was the brightest in their lives; they could not wait for the dawn of the next day on which they would join the heavens and settle in the endless bliss. Habib ibn Muzhahir, for instance, was so cheerful, and when asked why, he answered, "It is only a few hours and

those tyrants will attack us with their swords to make us embrace the women of Paradise. This time then is most worthy of cheer.” The other companions who were filled with deep-rooted and unshakable faith uttered similar words. [14](#)

At that night, too, Imam al-Husayn (a) took a nap, and when he woke up, he told his family members and companions about his dream:

“I dreamt that dogs attacked me so savagely that they bit me. The most savage among them was a spotted one. As much as I understand from this dream, I foresee that I will be slain by a leprous man. I then saw, in dream too, my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah (S), with a group of his companions addressing to me: You are the shahid of Muhammad’s family. The inhabitants of the heavens, especially the elevated ones, are glad because they anticipate that you will join them very soon. Tonight, be my guest. Please, hurry up and do not be slow. [15](#)

At that night, too, clouds of panic and terror covered the harem totally. They did not see a single moment of ease as each one of them imagined the horrifying future after the demise of their lord, Imam al-Husayn (a), and their protector, Abul-Fadl al-Abbas, as well as their family men. They had no weapon other than weeping and praying to Almighty Allah.

The most grievous one among them was their chief, Lady Zaynab, who watched all the events so attentively and already knew that all the responsibility would be hers. She also anticipated that none of her family men would survive after tomorrow; the black tomorrow.

Owing to her great concern about her brother, Lady Zaynab, on that night, watched the tents of the companions and the Hashemites so that she would be aware of their real situations and, hence, how would they behave tomorrow. She first went slowly near the tent of her brother, Abul-Fadl al-Abbas, to listen to him while he was delivering instructions to the Hashemite warriors:

Al-Abbas asked, “Brothers, nephews, and cousins: what are you going to do in the morning?”

“You decide, and we carry out,” they said.

Courageously, al-Abbas said, “Our companions and supporters are not our relatives. And our own people must carry a heavy burden. Next morning, we will be the first to fight and will precede our companions to death so that people will not blame us.”

Before he finished, they all shouted in one voice, “We all agree to this opinion.”

This conversation gave some hope to Lady Zaynab who, then, directed towards the tent of the companions to listen to them. They were gathering in the tent of their Head, Habib ibn Muzhahir, who asked them, “O companions: what are you going to do in the morning?”

“You decide, and we carry out,” they said.

Habib spoke, “Next morning, we will be the first to fight and will precede the Hashemites to death. We should never see a Hashemite person stained with blood. Otherwise, people will blame us and say that we made them fight before us so that we could save our souls.”

All the companions shouted in one voice, “We all agree to this opinion, Habib.”

Lady Zaynab hence understood that the companions would never let Imam al-Husayn (a) down and would defend him until the last spark of their lives. She therefore directed towards the tent of the leader, Imam al-Husayn (a), to report these news to him. The Imam (a) thanked Allah for them and their sentiments and told his sister that these individuals were the choice of the Almighty Allah. [16](#)

[1.](#) See al-Fadl ibn Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Ilam al-Wara bi Alam al-Huda*, vol. 1, p. 451.

[2.](#) The Arabic ‘karb’ means ‘agony’, and the Arabic ‘bala’ means ‘ordeal’. Hence, the word ‘Karbala’ is a combination of these two words. In fact, ‘Karbala’ is an ancient name of the region it refers to. For more information about the origin of ‘Karbala’, refer to Sayyid Sami al-Badri, *The Holy Quran and Archaeology*, Translated by Badr Shahin, Issue No. 1, Chapter: Karbala in the Ancient Oriental Linguistic Heritage, First Edition, 1421.

[3.](#) See Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44, p. 383.

[4.](#) See Ibn Shubah al-Harrani, *Tuhaf al-Uqul*; 287

[5.](#) See Abu-Hanifah al-Daynuri, *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, p. 253.

[6.](#) See Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, *Mirat al-Zaman fi Tawarikh al-Ayan*, p. 89.

[7.](#) See Shaykh al-Saduq, *al-Amali*, p. 221.

[8.](#) See Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhiri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 3, p. 181.

[9.](#) See Ibn Shahrashub’s *Manaqib Al-Abi-Talib*; 3:213.

[10.](#) See Shaykh al-Shurayfi, *Mawsuat Kalimat al-Imam al-Husayn*, p. 391 as quoted from Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 2, p. 558.

[11.](#) See Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Irshad*, vol. 2, p. 90.

[12.](#) See Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 3, p. 285.

[13.](#) See Abu-Mikhnaf al-Azdi, *Maqatal al-Husayn*, p. 177.

[14.](#) See Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*; 6:241.

[15.](#) See Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 45, p. 3.

[16.](#) See Shaykh al-Shurayfi, *Mawsuat Kalimat al-Imam al-Husayn*, p. 409.