

Some of the people Imam Husayn met on his tragic journey to Kufa

When Imam Husayn travelled along that tragic road to Karbala', many tribesmen joined him. Few of those who joined him on the road actually died at Karbala'. But these men were not traitors or cowards, they left the Imam with the Imam's blessing. Most of them had originally believed that they were going to a victory that was already awaiting them, but some actually joined him knowing that the end of the journey was doom. These men were important witnesses of events and have provided us with many of the details of the account of that tragic journey and the dreadful slaughter.

Among the tribesmen who joined the Imam on the journey were two men from the tribe of Asad. On *Yawm al-Tarwiya* these two men from the tribe of Asad, who lived in Kufa, entered Mecca just before Imam Husayn left. They had come to make the pilgrimage. They saw him leave and heard him refuse to lead a revolt in Mecca. It seems they performed the *tawdf* around the Ka'ba and the say between al-Safa and al-Marwa with him. When these rites were finished, Imam Husayn trimmed his hair as the completion of the lesser pilgrimage, the *umra*, and departed for Kufa while these two men went on to Mina to perform the rites of the *hajj*¹.

After they had completed the pilgrimage, both of them were determined to join Imam Husayn. Just as they were catching up with him and about to join him, they saw a rider coming from Kufa deliberately turning off the road to avoid meeting the Imam. The two men, anxious to discover his reason for doing this, went after him.

They caught up with him and, as they all came from the same tribe, conversation among them all was easy. The man from Kufa told the other two that he had left Kufa after Muslim ibn `Aqil and Hani' ibn `Urwa had been put to death. Kufa was now an armed camp waiting to seize Imam Husayn. With this news, the two men went back to Imam Husayn's group and asked to speak to him.

They said they had news to give him and wanted to know whether they should speak to him privately or in front of all the people with him. The Imam held no secrets from his faithful followers: they all learnt of the sad events in Kufa. After a family conference, all the members of the Imam's family wanted to

continue the journey with him, but with the Imam's blessing, some of the tribesmen left him then².

However, these two men from the tribe of Asad stayed with the Imam and were still with him when he was stopped by the vanguard of the forces sent against him by Ibn Ziyad. They seem to have escaped from death either before or during the battle. Imam Husayn had given them and other tribesmen permission to leave him when he said, on the day before the battle:

I know of no followers more fitting and more virtuous than my followers, nor of any family more pious and caring about family relationships than my family, may God reward you well on my behalf. Indeed I think that our final day will come tomorrow through these enemies. I have thought about you.

All go away with the absolution of your oath, for there will be no obligation on you from me. This is a night whose darkness will give you cover to use. Use it as a camel, to ride away with it. Every one of you take the hand of a man from my family, then scatter in your lands of the Sawad and your towns, until God relieves you. The people only want me. If they find me, they will cease searching for anyone else³.

Another two Arab tribesmen went to Imam Husayn and asked if they could stay and fight with him but when there were no other of his supporters left that he would allow them to escape. He gave them the permission they sought and when most of his supporters had been killed, they escaped⁴.

To these four men, we are greatly indebted, for they have provided us with many of the details of what took place on Imam Husayn's tragic journey.

There were two men whom Imam Husayn actually asked to join him on his journey. The first of these, Zuhayr ibn Qayn, did not belong to the Shi`a. If anything, he seems to have been opposed to the Shi`a, he appears to have been a man who was a good Muslim but whose only thoughts on matters of the true destiny of the Islamic *Umma* concerned his own interests which he perceived, or was told, were not going to be improved by the advent of the Imam to political office.

He had been on the pilgrimage and was returning with his wife and some of his tribesmen. They must have caught up with Imam Husayn and the two parties were travelling alongside each other. Zuhayr was trying to avoid any contact with the Imam and kept his camp away from Imam's.

In fact when Imam Husayn sent a messenger to ask to talk to him, he refused. However, when his wife shamed him into going to talk to Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, the reality of his former false ideas became clear, he felt the magnetism of the charismatic Imam, he perceived his goodness, he saw an ideal that could not be deserted. He left his wife and comrades and joined the Imam⁵.

He became an important adviser and supporter and died fighting for him at Karbala⁶.

The other person whom Imam Husayn met and asked to join him, was `Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr. He was a Kufan noble who earlier in Kufa had professed some support for the Imam, but this was talk rather than action. He had left Kufa in order to avoid the moral dilemma of choosing sides. By his earlier words he

would have had to have chosen Imam Husayn's side, but he felt that that would be the losing side. By chance, he had pitched his tent along the route that Imam Husayn was taking after being intercepted by the vanguard of the enemy's forces. So, when Imam Husayn asked him to join him, he refused and the Imam went on without him.⁷

He regretted this decision for the rest of his life. After Imam Husayn was killed, he went to visit Karbala' and there recited a beautiful poem of sadness, regret and remorse. In it he says:

Oh how much I regret that I did not help him!

Indeed every soul that does not set upon the right course, regrets.

Indeed because I was not among his defenders,

I have a great grief that will never depart.⁸

Finally there was a third group of people who joined Imam Husayn. These men came from the ranks of the enemy who had come to kill Imam Husayn. The most notable of these was Hurr ibn Yazid. He had been the commander of the vanguard of horsement sent out to stop Imam Husayn from getting to Kufa. He was a soldier, a loyal, trustworthy man who obeyed orders and expected his leaders to act with integrity and honour. He had stopped Imam Husayn and accompanied him around Kufa, neither letting him go on into Kufa, nor back to Mecca⁹.

In this period, he got to know more about the Imam and the moral implications of what he was involved in. He was able to recognize the goodness, the honour, the outstanding qualities of the Imam. He never believed that his superiors would fight Imam Husayn and kill him. Right up until the last moment, he hoped that they would change their orders.

When he saw that they would not, on the very morning of the dreadful battle, he rode over to the Imam, he asked for forgiveness for what he had done and asked if he could fight and die for him¹⁰. With the approval of the Imam, he fought bravely and died in the service of the Imam¹¹.

These three groups of people whom the Imam met on his tragic journey to Karbala' are important in that those who survived give us valuable information about the tragic journey. This is essential if the account of the Imam's great sacrifice is to be known by later generations. The others who died with Imam Husayn are in many ways more important because their sacrifice on behalf of the Imam serves as an inspiration to the rest of us.

¹. Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 275–6.

². Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 291–2.

³. Tabari, op. Cit., p. 321.

⁴. Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 321–2.

⁵. Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 290–91, 354–5.

⁶. Tabari, op. Cit., p. 350.

⁷. Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 305–6.

⁸. Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 389.

[9.](#) Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 297–300.

[10.](#) Tabari, op. Cit., pp. 333–4.

[11.](#) Tabari, op. Cit., p. 350.

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