

The Events Of The Night Of 'Ashura'

The Speech of al-Husayn (as) on the Night of 'Ashura'

'Ali bin al-Husayn (as) says: "Al-Husayn gathered his companions after 'Umar bin Sa'd went back, and this was just before the sunset. So I went near to hear him [even though] I was sick. I heard my father say to his companions:

"I praise Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, with the best of praises. I praise him in ease and difficulty. O Allah, I praise You for honouring us with the prophethood (*nubuwwah*), teaching us the Qur'an and making us comprehend your religion. You gave us [the faculties of] hearing, sight and the hearts; and you did not make us among the idolaters.

I know of no companions more loyal and more virtuous than my companions, nor of any household more righteous and more close-knit than my household. May Allah reward you all the best of rewards on my behalf.

Indeed, I think tomorrow is the day of our [encounter] with these enemies. I deem appropriate that you should all freely leave [me]. I have exempted you of your obligations towards me. Here is the night which has drawn its veil on you, so take it as a mount [and leave].¹ Let each one of you hold the hand of one of my family members and get scattered to your [respective] residences and cities so that may Allah deliver [you]; for these people are after me only, and if they get hold of me they will not be concerned about the rest."

The Stand of the Hashimites

'Abbas bin 'Ali (as) was the first to talk. He said to him: "Why should we do [that]? Just in order to remain alive after you?! May Allah never show us that [day]!"

Then his brothers and the sons [of al-Husayn (as)] and the sons of his brother [al-Hasan (as)], and the two sons of 'Abdullah bin Ja'far [Muhammad and 'Abdullah], all spoke in similar vein.

Al-Husayn (as) then said: “O sons of ‘Aqil, the martyrdom of Muslim is a sacrifice sufficient on your part. Go as I permit you [to leave].”

They answered: “What will the people say! They will say that we deserted our master, our leader and the sons of our uncles, who was the best of the uncles; that we did not [even] shoot an arrow alongside them, nor did we stab with the spears and strike with the swords with them, nor did we know what they did. Nay, by Allah! We will never do [such a thing]. Rather we will ransom you with our lives, our wealth and our children. We will fight by your side until we enter the place you shall enter! May Allah make life abominable [for us] after your [death]!”²

The Stand of His Companions

Muslim bin ‘Awsajah al-Asadi³ then stood up and said: “If we leave you alone, what excuse would we give to Allah for not fulfilling your rights [on us]? By Allah! [I will fight] till I break my spear in their chests. I will strike them with my sword as long as its hilt remains in my hand. I will not leave you. If I have no weapon to fight them with, I will throw stones at them in your defence until I die with you.”

[After Ibn ‘Awsajah] Sa’id bin ‘Abdullah al-Hanafi said: “By Allah we will not leave you until Allah knows that we have preserved through you [the company of] the Prophet of Allah (S) in his absence. By Allah! If I knew that I would be killed and then be revived and then be burnt alive and then scattered, and that would be done to me seventy times, I would [still] not leave you until I met my death [fighting] on your behalf! Why should I not do so when it is only [a matter of] getting killed once? Then, it is an everlasting honour.”

Zuhair bin al-Qain said: “By Allah! I wish I would be killed and then revived and again be killed until I get killed like this a thousand times, so that Allah should avert death from you and from these youths of your household!”

A group among his companions [then rose] and said: “By Allah! We will not part with you; may our souls be sacrificed for you. We will protect you with our throats, foreheads and hands. If we get killed, then we would have fulfilled and performed what lies on us.”

[Another] group among his companions [also stood] and spoke words to the same effect.⁴

The Imam (as) on the Night of ‘Ashura’

‘Ali bin al-Husayn bin ‘Ali (as) says: “I was sitting on the night before the morning of the day in which my father was martyred, and my aunt Zainab was looking after me, when my father distanced himself [from us] to a tent erected for him together with his companions. Huwayy⁵, the slave of Abu Dharr al-Ghaffari, was by his side preparing his sword and putting it right, while my father recited the following verses:

O Time! Shame on you as a friend!

At the days dawning and the sun's setting,

How many a companion or seeker [of yours] will be a corpse!

Time will not be satisfied with any substitute.

Indeed the matter will rest with the Mighty One,

And every living creature will have to journey along my path.

He repeated it twice or three times. I understood it and realized what he meant. Tears choked me and I pushed them back and kept silent, as I knew that tribulation had come upon us. As for my aunt, she heard what I heard, [but since] she was a woman –and tenderness and grief are part of a woman– she could not control herself. She jumped up and went near [al-Husayn], while her clothes dragged on the ground and her head was uncovered. She cried out: “What a bereavement! If only death would deprive me of life! [There was] a day when my mother, Fatimah, died and [then] my father, ‘Ali and [then] al-Hasan, my brother. Only you have remained O the successor and the surviving of those who have gone!”⁶

So al-Husayn (as) looked at her and said: “O sister, do not let Shaitan take away your forbearance.”

[My aunt] said: “May my father and mother be your ransom, O Aba ‘Abdillah! Are you ready to die? May my life be sacrificed for you!”

[Here my father] swallowed his grief and his eyes filled with tears and he said: “[Remember] if the sandgrouse are left [alone] at night, they will sleep [i.e. had these people left me on my own, I would not have come here].”

[At this] she lamented: “O my grief! Is your life going to be violently wrenched from you?! This is too wounding to my heart and harsher to my soul”, and then she struck her face and grabbed the upper part of her garment and [began to] tear it and fell down in a faint.

So al-Husayn (as) got up and sprinkled water on to her face and consoled her [saying]: “O sister, fear Allah and take comfort in the consolation of Allah. Know that the people on the earth are [all] going to die and the inhabitants of heaven will not live [forever]. Everything is going to perish except the face of Allah who created the earth by His power, sends forth creatures and [ultimately] they [all] return [back to him]. He is unique and alone. [O my sister,] my father was better than me, my mother was better than me and my brother was better than me. They and I and every Muslim have an ideal model in the Prophet of Allah (S).”

[Al-Husayn (as)] tried to console her by this and the like and then said to her: “Sister! I swear to you – and I [always] keep my oaths– that you must not tear your clothes, nor scratch your face, nor cry out in grief and loss when I die.”

[Al-Husayn (as)] then brought her and made her sit with me.

He [then] went to his companions and ordered them to bring their tents closer together and to make the tent-pegs come within the area of each other's tents. [He also asked them] to remain between the tents except the side from which the enemy could come against them.⁷

Al-Husayn (as) then gathered stalks and firewood to a sunken place –which was similar to a canal– behind their tents. They dug it at some hour of the night and turned it into something like a ditch. Then they filled it with those firewood and reed and said: “When they attack and fight us, we will set it on fire, so that we are not attacked from the rear and we would fight them from one side.”⁸

Al-Husayn (as) and His Companions on the Night of ‘Ashura’

When the night entered al-Husayn (as) and his companions spent the whole night in performing prayers, seeking forgiveness and making supplications.

[Dahhak bin ‘Abdullah al-Mushriqi al-Hamdani, the one among the companions of al-Husayn (as) who was saved from being killed reports:]

“A group of their horsemen passed us keeping watch over us, while al-Husayn (as) was reciting: ‘Let the faithless not suppose that the respite that We grant them is good for their souls; We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and there is a humiliating punishment for them. Allah will not leave the faithful in your present state, until he has separated the bad ones from the good.’⁹ So a man from among those horsemen –who were keeping watch over us– heard that and said: ‘By the Lord of the Ka’bah, we are pure and have been distinguished from you.’”

[Dahhak says:] “I recognized the person and said to Burair bin Hudhair [al-Hamdani]¹⁰: ‘Do you know who this man is?’ He said: ‘No.’ I said: ‘He is Abu Harb al-Sabi’i al-Hamdani ‘Abdullah bin Shahr. He is a joker and an idle [person], [though] a noble, brave, and a killer whom Sa’id bin Qais¹¹ had –as if– once imprisoned for a crime!’

So Burair bin Hudhair said to him: ‘O sinner! Has Allah made you among the pure ones?!’

He said: ‘Who are you?’

[Burair] replied: ‘I am Burair bin Hudhair.’

[Abu Harb] said: ‘Verily, we belong to Allah! How painful it is for me. By Allah, You are destroyed. By Allah, you are destroyed O Burair!’

[Burair] said: ‘O Aba Harb! Is there any way for you to repent for your great sins?! For by Allah, we are the ones who are indeed the pure, while you people are, indeed, the impure ones!’

[Abu Harb mockingly] said: ‘And I bear witness to that!’

So I [i.e. Dahhak] said to him: ‘Woe onto you! Did your knowledge not benefit you?’

[Abu Harb scornfully] said: ‘May I be sacrificed for you. Who will then carouse with Yazid bin ‘Adharah al-Anzi who is here with me?’

[Burair] said: ‘May Allah make your opinion vile! You are in any way a fool!’ [Hearing this,] he went away.”¹²

^{1.} Al-Tabari (5:418): “Harith bin Hasirah has narrated to me from ‘Abdullah bin Sharik al-Amiri, who narrated from ‘Ali bin al-Husayn (as) that...” See also Maqatil al-Talibiyyin (pg.74) and al-Irshad (pg.231) from Imam ‘Ali bin al-Husayn (as).

^{2.} See Maqatil al-Talibiyyin (pg.74), al-Irshad (pg.231) and Tadhkirat al-Khawass (pg.249).

^{3.} We have given his biography along with other Shi’ite noblemen of Kufah who were with Muslim bin ‘Aqil. This is the first report among the reports of Karbala’ in which his name has appeared, without there being any mention in the books of history about how he got there.

^{4.} Al-Tabari (5:418): “‘Abdullah bin ‘Asim al-Faishi has related to me from Dahhak bin ‘Abdullah al-Mushriqi al-Hamdani who said...” See also Maqatil al-Talibiyyin (pg.74; Najaf edition), Tarikh al-Ya’qubi (2:231) and al-Irshad (pg.231).

^{5.} Al-Irshad (pg.232) names him as Juwain, while Maqatil al-Talibiyyin (pg.75) refers to him as Jaun, and so has al-Manaqib of Ibn Shahrashub (2:218), al-Tadhkirah of Ibn al-Jawzi (2:19) and al-Maqtal of al-Khwarazmi (1:237). Al-Tabari does not mention anything about him, neither before this nor after this. Nor does he say anything about his martyrdom alongside the Imam (as).

^{6.} This has appeared in al-Irshad (pg.232) also, but with a slight literal difference in the wordings of the last statement. Ibn al-Jawzi also brings this report in al-Tadhkirah (pg.250; Najaf edition) with the following addition: “...and she then struck her face.”

^{7.} Al-Tabari (5:420): “Harith bin Ka’b and Abu al-Dahhak have related to me from ‘Ali bin al-Husayn that...” See also Maqatil al-Talibiyyin (pg.75; Najaf edition), al-Ya’qubi (2:230) and al-Irshad (pg.232; Najaf edition), all of whom narrated this report from Imam al-Sajjad (as).

^{8.} Al-Tabari (5:421): “[I relate] on the authority of ‘Abdullah bin ‘Asim from Dahhak bin ‘Abdullah al-Mushriqi who said...” See also al-Irshad (pg.233) who narrated it from Dahhak bin ‘Abdullah.

^{9.} Qur’an, 3:178–179.

^{10.} The predominant view about his father’s name is what has appeared in al-Irshad (pg.233) and other works (i.e. Hudhair). The above narration is the first among the narrations of Karbala’ in which his name has appeared, without there being any mention of how he joined the Imam (as). Al-Tabari: Burair was the best reciter of the Qur’an in Kufah (5:431) and a devout man. He was the first person who stood up to fight in the beginning of the battle [on the day of ‘Ashura’], but the Imam (as) ordered him to sit down (5:429). Burair is the one who said to ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Abdi Rabbih al-Ansari: “By Allah, my people know that I never loved falsehood both as a youth and as an old man. But –by Allah– I am happy with what we are going to achieve! By Allah, there is nothing between us and the hur al-‘ain [as a barrier] except that these people should strike us with their swords. And I wish that they would do so” (5:423). Burair used to say that ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan was an extravagant [personality] and that Mu’awiyah bin Abi Sufyan was a person who went astray and misled others, and that the leader of the truth and guidance was ‘Ali bin Abi Talib (as). He challenged a man from the army of ‘Umar bin Sa’d called Yazid bin Ma’qil about the truth of the aforementioned beliefs and prayed that the one who is right among the two should kill the one who is on the wrong. He then fought him and killed him (5:431).

^{11.} Al-Tabari: Sa’id bin Qais al-Hamdani was the governor of Hamadan and was later dismissed from the post by Sa’id bin al-‘As al-Ashraq, the governor of Kufah, who then appointed him over Rayy in 33 H (5:330). ‘Ali (as), the Commander of the Faithful, had sent Ibn Qais together with Shabath bin Rib’i and Bashir bin ‘Amru before the battle [of Siffin] to Mu’awiyah, inviting him to obedience and to [join] the community [of the believers] (4:573). Sa’id was fighting along side ‘Ali in Siffin (4:574). He was among the first people to carry out the instructions of the Commander of the Faithful (as) (5:79).

Amir al-Mu'minin (as) had dispatched him to chase Sufyan bin 'Auf after the latter's raid on al-Anbar and al-Hait. So he came out in pursuit of them until he passed al-Hait but could not reach them (5:134). There is no mention of him after this report, or any trace of him in [the books of] history. [In any case,] his imprisonment of Abu Harb al-Sabi'i was, perhaps, during his governance over Hamadan or Rayy during the time of 'Uthman.

[12.](#) Al-Tabari (5:421): "Abu Mikhnaf says: '[I relate] from Dahhak bin 'Abdullah al-Mushriqi on the authority of 'Abdullah bin 'Asim ...'"

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