

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 3

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Martyrdom Of Muslim Ibn Aqil

That same morning the son of that old woman went to ‘Abd al- Rahman b. Muhammad b. al-Ash’ath and told him about Muslim b. ‘Aqil being with his mother. ‘Abd al-Rahman went to his father who was with Ibn Ziyad. He went to him and Ibn Ziyad learned his secret. "Get up and bring him to me immediately," said Ibn Ziyad to (Muhammad b. al-Ashath), poking a cane into his side. He sent (Amr b.) Ubayd Allah b. Abbas al-Sulam, with him, together with seventy men from the tribal group of Qays. They went to the house where Muslim b. Aqil was. When the latter heard the beating of horses' hooves and the voices of men, he knew that it was him whom they had come for. He went out against them with his sword (drawn) as they rushed blindly towards the house. He fell upon them and struck them with his sword so that he drove them away from the house. They repeated the attack, and Muslim counter-attacked in the same way.

He and Bakr b. Humran al-Ahmari exchanged blows and Bakr struck Muslim's mouth, cutting his top lip and slicing down to the lower lip to knock out two of his teeth. Muslim struck him a terrible blow on the head and repeated it again, cutting a nerve along his shoulder with a blow which almost reached his stomach.

When the people saw that, they (went up and) looked down on him (Muslim) from the tops of the houses, and began to hurl stones at him and to light canes of wood with fire which they threw from the top of the house. When he saw that, he went out against them into the lane with his sword unsheathed.

"You can have my guarantee of security," said Muhammad b. al- Ashath, "don't kill yourself."

But he continued to fight against them saying:

I swear I will only be killed as a free man, although I see death as something horrible, Or it makes the cold a bitter heat and deflects the ray of the sun (for ever).

Every man one day will meet an evil, I fear that I will be cheated and deluded.

"You will not be cheated, deluded or deceived,"replied

Muhammad b. al-Ashath. "These people (i.e. the Banu Umayya) are your cousins and they will not fight against you or strike you."

He had been hurt by stones and weakened by the fighting. He was out of breath and he was propping his back up against the wall of that house. Ibn al-Ash'ath repeated the offer of security to him.

"Am I granted security?"he said.

"Yes,"he replied and he said to the people who were with him, "he is given security by me."

"Yes,"replied the people, except (Amr b.) 'Ubayd Allah b. al-Abbas al-Sulami.

"I have neither she camel or camel in this (i.e. I will have nothing to do with it),"he said and he turned aside.

"If you will not grant me security,"declared Muslim, "I will not put my hand in yours."

A mule was brought and he was put on it. They gathered around him and pulled his sword away. At that he was in despair for his life and his eyes filled with tears.

"This is the first betrayal,"he cried.

"I hope no harm will come to you,"called out Muhammad b. al- Ashath.

"Is it only hope?"he retorted as he wept. "Where then is your guarantee of security? Indeed we belong to God and to Him we will return."

"One who has sought for the like of what you have sought for, should not weep when there befalls him what has befallen you,"Amr b. 'Ubayd Allah b. al-'Abbas goaded him.

I would not weep for myself,"he replied, "nor would I grieve for my own death, even though I have not the slightest desire for destruction. But I am weeping for my family who are coming to me, I am weeping for al-Husayn and the family of al-Husayn, peace be on them.

Then he went closer to Muhammad b. al-Ash'ath and said:

"O servant of God, by God, I see that you are unable to grant me a guarantee of security. Yet do you have the goodness to be able to send one of your men with my message so that it will get to al-Husayn? For I have no doubt that he has already set out towards you, or will be setting out soon with his House.

(This messenger) would say:

Ibn 'Aqil has sent me to you. He is a prisoner in the hands of the people, and he does not expect to see evening before he is killed; and he says:

Return, may my father and mother be your ransom, with your House and do not let the Kufans tempt you, for they were the followers of your father and he desired to leave them even through death and murder. The Kufans have lied to you. A liar has no judgement.

"By God, I will do that," replied Ibn al-Ash'ath, "and I will inform Ibn Ziyad that I have given you a guarantee of security."

Ibn al-Ash'ath went with Ibn Aqil to the door of the palace. He asked permission to enter. Permission was given him and he went in (to see) Ibn Ziyad. He gave a report about Ibn 'Aqil and Bakr's blow against him, and about his own guarantee of security to him.

"What (is this about) you and a guarantee of security?" demanded 'Ubayd Allah, "as if we sent you to guarantee him security when we only sent you to bring him."

Ibn al-Ashath fell silent.

While Ibn Aqil remained at the palace door, his thirst had become severe. At the palace door there were people sitting waiting for permission to enter. Among them were 'Umara b. 'Uqba b. Abi

Mu'ayt, 'Amr b. Hurayth, Muslim b. Amr and Kathir b. Shihab.

There was a jug of cold water placed at the doorway.

"Give me a drink of that water," asked Muslim.

"See how cold it is," replied Muslim b. Amr, "but by God, you will never taste a drop of it until you taste the heat of Hell-fire."

"Shame on you whoever you are!" cried Ibn Aqil.

"I am the one who recognized the truth when you denied it; who was sincere to his Imam when you deceived him; who was obedient to him when you opposed him. I am Muslim b. Amr al-Bahili."

"Your mother has been bereft of a son," replied Ibn 'Aqil. "How coarse you are, how rough, how hard your heart is. Man of Bahila, you are more appropriate for the heat of Hell-fire and to remain there forever,

than I am."

He sat down, propping himself against a wall. 'Amr b. Hurayth sent one of his boys to bring a jug with a napkin and cup. He poured water into it and told him to drink. But whenever he went to drink, he filled the cup with blood so that he was not able to drink. He did that once, and then twice. When he made as if to drink for the third time, his tooth fell into the cup.

"Praise be to God,"he said, "if it had been a provision granted me (by God), I could have drunk it."

Ibn Ziyad's messenger came out and ordered him to go to (see) him. He went in but did not greet him as governor.

"Don't you greet the governor?"demanded the guard.

"If he wants my death, what is (the point of) my greeting him with words of peace?"he replied. "If he did not want my death, my greetings (of peace) to him would be profuse."

"By my life, you will be killed,"declared Ibn Ziyad.

"So be it,"he replied.

"Indeed, (it will)."

"Then let me make my will to one of my fellow tribesmen.

"Do (so)."

Muslim looked at those sitting with Ubayd Allah. Among them was 'Umar b. Saed b. Abl Waaaas. He said to him: "Umar, there is kinship between you and me and I have need of you. So you could carry out what I need of you. But it is secret."

Umar refused to listen to him.

"Why do you refuse to consider the need of your cousin?" asked Ubayd Allah. So Umar got up with him and sat where Ibn Ziyad could watch both of them.

"I have a debt in Kufa,"said Muslim. 'I borrowed seven hundred dirhams when I came to Kufa. Sell my sword and armour and pay the debt for me. When I have been killed, ask Ibn Ziyad to give you my corpse and bury it. Send to al-Husayn, peace be on him, someone to send him back. For I have written to him telling him that the people are with him and now I can only think that he is coming."

"Do you know what he said to me, governor?"Umar said to Ibn Ziyad. "He mentioned these things."

"The faithful would not betray you,"said Ibn Ziyad to (Muslim),

"But the traitor was confided in. As for what you have, it is yours, and we will not prevent you from doing with it what you like. As for the body when we have killed it, we do not care what is done with it. As for al-Husayn, if he does not intend (harm) to us, we will not intend (harm) to him.

Then Ibn Ziyad said: "Ibn Aqil, you came to the people while they were all (united) and you scattered them and divided their opinions so that some of them attacked others."

"No," replied Ibn 'Aqil, "I did not come for that but (because) the people of the town claimed that your father had killed their best men, shed their blood and appointed governors among them like the governors of Choesroe and Caesar. We came to enjoin justice and to urge rule by the Book."

"What are you (to do) with that, you great sinner?" cried Ibn Ziyad. "Why did you not do that among the people when you were drinking wine in Medina?"

"Me, drink wine! By God, God knows you are not speaking the truth, and have spoken without any knowledge, for I am not like you have said. It is you who are more correctly described as drinking wine than me, (you) who lap the blood of Muslims and kill the life whose killing God has forbidden and (you are one) who sheds sacred blood on behalf of usurpation, enmity and evil opinion while he (Yazid) enjoys himself and plays as if he had done nothing."

"You great sinner (fasiq)," shouted Ibn Ziyad, "your own soul made you desire what God prevented you from having (i.e. authority) (because) God did not regard you as worthy of it."

"Who is worthy of it, if we are not worthy of it?" asked Muslim. "The Commander of the faithful, Yazid," answered Ibn Ziyad.

"Praise be to God," called out Muslim. "We will accept God's judgement between us and you in every circumstance."

"May God kill me, if I do not kill you in such a way as no one in Islam has (ever) been killed before," retorted Ibn Ziyad.

"You are the person with the most right to commit crimes of innovation in Islam which have not been committed before," Muslim replied, "for you will never abandon evil murder, wicked punishment, shameful practice, and avaricious domination to anyone (else)."

Ibn Ziyad began to curse him, and to curse al-Husayn, 'Ali and 'Aqil, peace be on them, while Muslim did not speak to him. "Take him up to the top of the palace," ordered Ibn Ziyad, "and cut off his head, (throw it to the ground) and make (his body) follow it (to the ground)."

"By God," said Muslim, "if there was any (real) kinship between you and me, you would not kill me."

"Where is the man whose head Ibn Aqil struck with (his) sword?" asked Ibn Ziyad. Then Bakr b. Humran

al Ahmari was summoned and he told him: "Climb up, and you be the one who cuts his head off."

He went up with him. He (Muslim) said: "God is greater (Allahu Akbar)" He sought forgiveness from God and prayed for blessings on the Apostle, saying:

O God, judge between us and a people who have enticed us, lied against us and deserted us.

They (took) him to a part which overlooked where the shoemakers are today. His head was cut off (and thrown down) and his body was made to follow his head. Muhammad b. al-Ash'ash, then approached 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad and spoke to him of Hani' b. 'Urwa. He said:

"You know of the position of Hani' in the town and of his House in the clan. His people know that I and my colleague brought him to you. I adjure you before God, hand him over to me for I would not like (to face) the enmity of the town and his family."

He promised to do that but then afterwards something occurred to him and he ordered Hani' (to be) taken (immediately) to the market- place and (his head) cut off.

Hani' was taken in chains until he was brought to a place where sheep were sold. He began to shout: "O Madhhij! There is no one from Madhhij for me today! O Madhh,ij, where is Madhhij?"

When he realised that no one was going to help him, he pulled his hand and wrenched it free of the chain, crying: "What is there, stick, knife, stone or bone, with which a man can defend his life?" (At this) they jumped upon him and tied the chains (more) tightly. He was told to stretch out his neck but he answered: "I am not so liberal with my life and I will not help you (to take) my life."

A Turkish retainer (mawla) of Ubayd Allah called Rashid struck him with a sword but it did not do anything.

"To God is the return, O God to Your mercy and Your paradise," called out Hani'. Then (Rashid) struck him with another blow and killed him.

Concerning Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani' b. Urwa, may God have mercy upon them, Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr al-Asadi said:

If you do not know what death is, then look at Hani' in the market-place and Ibn Aqil:

(Look at) a hero whose face has been covered with wounds and another who fell dead from a high place. The command of the governor struck them (down) and they became legends for those who travel on every road.

You see a corpse whose colour death has changed and a spattering of blood which has flowed abundantly;

A young man who was (even) more bashful than a shy young woman, was more decisive than the polished blade of a two- edged sword.

Is Asma' riding in safety a mount which moves at walking pace while Madhhij urged him to seek vengeance And Murad wander around him? Are all of them in fear of the questioner and the questioned?

If you do not avenge your two brothers, then be harlots satisfied with little.

When Muslim and Hani' were killed, the mercy of God be on them, Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad sent their heads with Hani' b. Abi Hayya al- Wadi'i and al-Zubayr b. al-Arwah al-Tamimi to Yazid b. Muawiya

He ordered his secretary (katib) to write to Yazid about what had happened to Muslim and Hani'. The secretary who was 'Amr b. Nafi' – wrote but he was very wordy (in his style). He was the first to be wordy in writing letters. When Ubayd Allah saw the letter, he disliked it.

"What is this prolixity and this excessr' he asked.

"Write:

Praise be to God, Who exacted the dues of the Commander of the faithful and has given him sufficient provisions against his enemy. I (am writing to) inform the Commander of the faithful that Muslim b. 'Aqil took refuge in the house of Hani' b. 'Urwa al-Muradi. I set look-outs and spies on them, concealed men against them, I tricked them until I brought them out. God gave me power over them. Thus I came upon them and had them executed. I have sent their heads to you with Hani' b. Abi Hayya and al-Zubayr b. Arwah al-Tamimi. They are both people who are attentive and in obedience to you, and of sincerity. Let the Commander of the faithful ask them about whatever of the affair he may wish; for they have knowledge and truth.

Farewell. Greetings."

Yazid b. Muawiya wrote (back):

You have not gone beyond what I wanted. You have acted with the decisive action I wanted. You have launched into the attack with the violence of man who has control of his emotion. You have satisfied me, been sufficient for (the task) and corroborated my view of you and my opinion of you. I have summoned your two mes sengers and questioned them, and talked to them.

I found them in their views and merit as you had mentioned. Receive them both with kindness on my recommendation. I have been informed that al-Husayn has set out for Iraq. Therefore set look-outs and watches, be vigilant and detain suspicious (characters). Put to death (any who are) accused and write to me about any news which occurs. God, the Exalted, wishing.

Muslim b. 'Aqil's (attempted) rising in Kufa was on Tuesday, 8th of Dhu al-Hijja in the year 60 A.H.

(680). He, may God have mercy on him, was killed on Wednesday, 9th of Dhu al-Hijja, the Day of Arafa.

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