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Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Journey, The Martyrdom And Other Events

Al Husayn, the blessings of God be on him, set out from Mecca to Iraq on the day of Muslim's (attempted) rising in Kufa, that is the day of Tarwiya, after staying in Mecca for the rest of Shaban, the month of Ramadhan, Shawwal and Dhu al Qada and eight days of Dhu- al-Hijja in the year 60 A.H. (680). During his stay in Mecca, peace be on him, a number of Hijazis and Basrans had gathered around him, joining themselves to his household and his retainers (mawali).

When he determined on journeying to Iraq, he made the circumambulation of the (sacred) House and the ritual running between al-Safa and al-Marwa. Then he left the state of consecration (for the pilgrimage) (after) he had performed the lesser pilgrimage (umra) because he was not able to perform the greater pilgrimage (hajj). Through fear of being apprehended in Mecca, and being taken to Yazid b. Muawiya, he, peace be on him, had set out early with his House, his sons and those of his Shi'a who had joined him.

(As it has been reported to us:)

News of Muslim's (capture and death) had not yet reached him because (it had only happened) on the day he set out. (It is reported that al-Farazdaq, the poet, said:)

I made the pilgrimage with my mother in the year 60 A.H. (680). I was driving her camel when I entered the sanctuary. (There) I met al- Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, leaving Mecca accompanied by (some men carrying) swords and shields.

"Whose caravan is this?" I asked.

"Al-Husayn b. 'Ali's, peace be on them," was the reply. So I went up and greeted him.

"May God grant you your request and (fulfil) your hope in what you want, by my father and mother, son of the Apostle of God," I said to him. "But what is making you hurry away from the pilgrimage?"

"If I did not hurry away, I would be apprehended," he replied.

Then he asked me: "Who are you?"

"An Arab," I answered and he did not question me (about myself) any further.

"Tell me about the people you have left behind you," he asked.

"You have asked a good (question)," I answered. "The hearts of the people are with you but their swords are against you. The decision comes from Heaven and God does what he wishes."

"You have spoken truly of the affair belonging to God," he replied.

"Every day He (is involved) in (every) matter" (LV, 29) If fate sends down what we like and are pleased with, we praise God for His blessings. He is the One from Whom help should be sought in order to give thanks to Him. However, although fate may frustrate (our) hopes, yet He does not destroy (the souls of) those whose intention is the truth and whose hearts are pious."

"True, God brings you what you wish for (ultimately) and guards you against what you are threatened by," I said. Then I asked him about matters concerning vows and pilgrimage rites. He told me about them and then moved his mount off, saying farewell, and so we parted.

When al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, left Mecca, Yahya b. Said b. al-'As met him with a group (of men). They had been sent to him by 'Amr b. Said.

"Come back from where you are going," they ordered. But he refused (to obey) them and continued. The two groups came to blows and hit at each other with whips. However al-Husayn and his followers resisted fiercely. Al-Husayn continued until he got to al-Tanim. There he met a camel-train which had come from Yemen. He hired from its people (additional) camels for himself and his followers to ride.

Then he said to the owners (of the camels): "Whoever (of you) wants to come with us to Iraq, we will pay his hire and enjoy his company and whoever wants to leave some way along the road we will pay his hire for the distance he has travelled."

Some of the people went with him but others refused. Abd Allah b. Jafar sent his sons, Awn and Muhammad, after him, and he wrote a letter to him which he gave to them. In it, he said:

I ask you before God (to return) if you have set out when you see my letter. For I am very concerned because the direction in which you are heading will have within it your destruction, and the extirpation of your House. If you are destroyed today, the light of the land will be extinguished; for you are the (standard) those who are rightly-guided and the hope of the believers.

Do not hurry on your journey as I am following this letter.

Greetings.

Abd Allah, then went to 'Amr b. Sad and asked him to write to al-Husayn (offering him) a guarantee of security, and (promising) to favour him, so that he would return from where he was going. Amr b. Said wrote a letter in which he offered him favour and a guarantee of security for himself. He dispatched it with his brother Yahya b. Said. Yahya b. Said went after him (as did) Abd Allah after dispatching his sons. The two handed ('Amr's) letter to him and strove (to persuade) him to return.

"I have seen the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, in my sleep," answered (al-Husayn), "and he ordered me (to do) what I am carrying out."

"What was that vision?" they both asked.

"I have not told anyone of it," he answered, "and I am not going to tell anyone until I meet my Lord, the Mighty and Exalted."

When 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far despaired of (persuading) him, he told his sons, Awn and Muhammad, to stay with him, to go with him and to struggle on behalf of him. He returned with Yahya b. Sa'id to Mecca.

Al Husayn, peace be on him, pressed on swiftly and directly towards Iraq until he reached Dhat' Irq.

When Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had learnt of the journey of al-Husayn, peace be on him, from Mecca to Kufa, he had sent al-Husayn b. Numayr, the commander of the bodyguard (shurta), to station himself at al-Qadisiyya and to set up a (protective) link of cavalry between the area of al-Qadisiyya to Khaffan and the area of al-Qadisiyya to al-Qutqutaniyya. He informed the men that al-Husayn was heading for Iraq.

When al-Husayn, peace be on him, reached al-Hajiz (a hill above) Batn al-Rumma, he sent Qays b. Mushir al Saydawi – some say it was his brother-in-nurture, Abd Allah b. Yuqtur to Kufa. For he, peace be upon him, had not yet learnt the news of (the fate of) Ibn 'Aqil. He sent a letter with him:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

From al-Husayn b. 'Ali

To his brother believers and Muslims,

Greetings to you, I praise God before you, other than Whom there is no deity. Muslim b. Aqil's letter

came to me, informing me of your sound judgement and the agreement of your leaders to support us, and to seek our rights. I have asked God to make your actions good and reward you with the greatest reward. I set out to you from Mecca on 8th of Dhu al-Hijja, the Day of Tarwiya. When my messenger reaches you, be urgent and purposeful in your affairs, for I am coming to you within the (next few) days.

Greeting and the mercy and blessings of God.

Muslim had written to al-Husayn seventeen days before he was killed and the Kufans had written to him: "Here you have a hundred thousand swords. Do not delay."

Qays b. Mushir went towards Kufa with the letter. However, when he reached al-Qadisiyya, al-Husayn b. Numayr apprehended him and sent him to Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad.

"Go up on the pulpit," Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad ordered him, "and curse the liar, al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on him" Qays went up on the pulpit and praised and glorified God. Then he said:

People, this man, al-Husayn b. "Ali the best of God's creatures, the son of Fatimah, the daughter of the Apostle, God bless him and his family and grant them peace, (is nearby). I am his messenger to you. Answer him.

Then he cursed Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad and his father and prayed for forgiveness for 'Ali b. Abi Talib and blessed him. 'Ubayd Allah ordered him to be thrown from the top of the palace. They threw him and he was smashed to pieces.

(It is (also) reported:)

He fell on the ground in chains and his bones were crushed and there only remained to him his last breath. A man called 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umayr al-Lakhmi came to him and cut his throat. When he was told that that had been a shameful (thing to do) and he was blamed for it, he said: "I wanted to relieve him (of his suffering)."

(While this had been going on) al-Husayn, peace be on him, had left Hajiz in the direction of Kufa until he came to one of the watering (places) of the Arabs. There there was 'Abd Allah b. Muti al-'Adawli, who was staying there. When he saw al-Husayn, peace be on him, he got up and said to him: "(May I ransom) my father and mother for you, son of the Apostle of God, what has rought you (here)?" He brought him (forward) and helped him to dismount.

"It is a result of the death of Muawiya as you would know," replied al Husayn, peace be on him. "The Iraqis have written to me urging me to (come to) them"

"I remind you, son of the Apostle of God, (of God) and the sacredness of Islam, lest it be violated. I adjure you before God (to think) about the sacredness of Quraysh. I adjure you before God (to think) about the sacredness of the Arabs. By God, if you seek that which is in the hands of Banu Umayya, they

will kill you. If they kill you, they will never fear anyone after you. Then it will be the sacredness of Islam which is violated, and the sacredness of Quraysh and the sacredness of the Arabs. Don't do it! Don't go to Kufa! Don't expose yourself to Banu Umayya!"

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, insisted on continuing his journey.

(In the meantime) 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had ordered (the area) which was between Waqisa and the roads to Syria and Basra to be occupied (so that) they should not let anyone enter, nor anyone leave (Kufa).

However, al-Husayn, peace be on him, went on without knowing anything (of that) until he met some Arabs. He asked them (about the situation) and they told him: "No, by God, we don't know (anything about it) except that we cannot get into or out of (Kufa)." He continued on his journey.

(A group of Fazara and Bajila reported (the following account).

They said:

We were with Zuhayr b. al-Qayn al-Bajah when we came from Mecca. (Although) we were travelling alongside al-Husayn, peace be on him, there was nothing more hateful to us than that we should stop with him at a halting place. (Yet) when al-Husayn, peace be on him, travelled and halted, we could not avoid halting with him. Al-Husayn halted at the side (of the road) and we halted at the (other) side (of the road). While we were sitting, eating our food, a messenger of al-Husayn, peace be on him, approached, greeted us and entered (our camp).

"Zuhayr b. al-Qayn," he said, "Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn, peace be on him, has sent me to you (to ask) you to come to him." Each man of us threw away what was in his hands (i.e. threw up his hands in horror); it was (as surprising) as if birds had alighted on our heads.

"Glory be to God," (Zuhayr's) wife said to him, "did the son of the Messenger of God send for you? Then aren't you going to him? If you went to him, you would hear what he had to say. Then you could leave him (if you wanted to)."

Zuhayr b. al-Qayn went (across) to him. It was not long before he returned to announce that he was heading east. He ordered his tent (to be struck) and (called for) his luggage, mounts and equipment.

His tent was pulled down and taken to al-Husayn, peace be on him, then he said to his wife: "You are divorced, go back to your family, for I do not want anything to befall you except good."

Then he said to his companions:

Whoever wants to follow me (may do so), otherwise he is at the end of his covenant with me (i.e. released from obedience to follow Zuhayr as the leader of his tribal group). I will tell you a story (of

something which happened to me once): we were raiding a rich land. God granted us victory and we won (a lot of) booty. Salman al-Farsi, the mercy of God be on him, said to us: 'Are you happy with the victory which God has granted you and the booty you have won?'

We said: 'Yes.' Then he said: 'Therefore when you meet the lord of the young men of the family of Muhammad be happier to fight with them than you are with the booty which you have obtained today.' As for me. I pray that God may be with you."

He remained among the people with al-Husayn until he was killed.

(Abd Allah b. Sulayman and al-Mundhir b. Mushamill both from Asad, reported:)

When we had finished the pilgrimage, there was no concern more important to us than to join al-Husayn, peace be on him, on the road, so that we might see what happened in his affair. We went along trotting our two camels speedily until we joined him at Zarud. As we approached, there we (saw) a man from Kufa who had changed his route when he had seen al-Husayn, peace be on him. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, had stopped as if he wanted (to speak to) him, but (the man) ignored him and went on. We went on towards the man.

One of us said to the other: "Come with us to ask this man if he has news of Kufa."

We came up to him and greeted him. He returned our greeting.

"From which (tribe) do you come, fellow?" we asked.

"(I am) an Asadi," he answered.

"We also are Asadis," we said. "Who are you?"

"I am Bakr b. so and so," he answered and we told him our lineage.

"Tell us of the people (you have left) behind you?" we asked.

"Yes," he replied, "I only left Kufa after Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani' b. 'Urwa had been killed. I saw them being dragged by their legs into the market-place."

We went on to join al-Husayn, peace be on him, and we were travelling close to him until he stopped at al-Thalabiyya in the evening. We caught up with him when he stopped and we greeted him. He returned our greeting.

"May God have mercy on you," we said, "we have news. If you wish, we will tell it to you publicly or if you wish, secretly."

He looked at us and at his followers.

"There is no veil for these men,"he answered.

"Did you see the rider whom you were near, yesterday evening?"

"Yes,"he answered, "I had wanted to question him."

"We have got the news from him and spared you (the trouble of) questioning him,"we said. "He was a man from our (tribe), of sound judgment, honesty and intelligence. He told us that he had only left Kufa after Muslim and Hani' had been killed, and he had seen them being dragged by their legs into the market-place."

"We belong to God and to Him we shall return; may God have mercy on them both,"said al-Husayn, and he repeated that several times.

"We adjure you before God,"we exhorted him, "for your own life and for your House that you do not go from this place, for you have no one to support you in Kufa and no Shi'a. Indeed we fear that such men (will be the very ones who) will be against you."

"What is your opinion,"he asked, looking towards the sons of 'Aqil, "now that Muslim has been killed?"

"By God,"they declared, "we will not go back until we have taken our vengeance or have tasted (the death) which he tasted."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, came near us and said: "There is nothing good (left) in life for these men."

Then we knew that his decision had been taken to continue the journey.

"May God be good to you,"we said.

"May God have mercy on you both,"he answered.

Then his followers said to him: "By God, you are not the same as Muslim b. Aqil. If you go to Kufa, the people will rush to (support) you."

He was silent and waited until daybreak. Then he ordered his boys and servants to get a lot of water, to give (the people) to drink and more for the journey. They set out (once more) and went on to Zubala. News of Abd Allah b. Yuqtur reached him. He took out a written statement to the people and read it to them:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,

News of the dreadful murder of Muslim b. Aqil Hani' b. Urwa, and Abd Allah b. Yuqtur has reached us. Our Shi'a have deserted us . Those of you who would prefer to leave us, may leave freely without guilt.

The people began to disperse from him to right and left until there were only left with him those followers

who had come with him from Medina, and a small group of those who had joined him. Al-Husayn had done that because he realised that the Arabs who had followed him had only followed him because they thought that he was going to a land where the inhabitants' obedience to him had already been established. And he did not want them to accompany him without being (fully) aware of what they were going to.

At dawn, he ordered his followers to provide themselves with water and with extra (supplies of it). Then they set out until they passed Batn al Aqaba. He stopped there and was met by a shaykh of the Banu Ikrima called Amr b. Lawdhan.

"Where are you headings,"he asked.

"Kufa,"replied al-Husayn, peace be on him.

"I implore you before God,"exhorted the shaykh, "why are you going there? You won't come to anything there except the points of spears and the edges of swords. If those who sent for you were enough to support you in battle and had prepared the ground for you, and you came to them, that would be a wise decision. However, in the light of the situation as it has been described I don't think that you ought to do it."

Servant of God,"he answered, "wise decisions are not hidden from me. yet the commands of God, the Exalted, cannot be resisted. By God, (my enemies) will not leave me till they have torn the very heart from the depths of my guts. If they do that, God will cause them to be dominated and humiliated until they become the most humiliated of the factions among nations.

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