

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

He, peace be on him, went on from Batn al Aqaba until he stopped at Sharaf (for the night). At dawn he ordered his boys to get water and more (for the journeys) When he continued from there until midday. While he was journeying, one of his followers exclaimed:

"God is greater (Allahu akbar)!"

"God is greater (Allahu akbar)!" responded al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then he asked: "Why did you say Allahu akbar?"

"I saw palm-trees," answered the man.

"This is a place in which we never see a palm-tree," a group of his followers asserted.

"What do you think it is then?" asked al-Husayn, peace be on him.

"We think it is the ears of horses," they answered.

"By God, I think so too," he declared. Then he said: "(So that) we can face them in one direction (i.e. so that we are not surrounded), we should put at our rear whatever place of refuge (we can find)."

"Yes," said to him, "there is Dhu Husam over on your left. If you reach it before them, it will be (in) just (the position) you want." So he veered left towards it and we went in that direction with him. Even before we had had time to change direction the vanguard of the cavalry appeared in front of us and we could see them clearly. We left the road and when they saw that we had moved off the road, they (also) moved off the road towards us. Their spears looked like palm branches stripped of their leaves and their standards were like birds' wings. Al-Husayn ordered his tents (to be put up) and they were erected. The people

came up; (there were) about one thousand horsemen under the command of al-Hurr b. Yazid al-Tamimi. (It was) during the heat of midday (that) he and his cavalry stood (thus) facing al-Husayn, peace be on him. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, and his followers were all wearing their turbans and their swords (ready to fight).

"Provide (our) people with water and let them quench their thirst and give their horses water to drink little by little," al-Husayn ordered his boys. They did that and they began filling their bowls and cups and took them to the horses. When a horse had drunk three or four or five draughts, the water was taken away and given to another horse—until they had all been watered.

(‘Ali b. al-Taan al-Muharibi reported:)

I was with al-Hurr on that day, I was among the last of his followers to arrive. When al-Husayn, peace be on him, saw how thirsty both I and my horse were, he said: "Make your beast (rawiya) kneel." I thought rawiya meant water-skin so he said: "Cousin, make your camel (jamal) kneel." I did so. Then he said: "Drink." I did so, but when I drank, water flowed from my water-skin.

"Bend your water-skin," said al-Husayn. I did not know how to do that. He came up (to me) and bent it (into the proper position for drinking). Then I drank and gave my horse to drink.

Al-Hurr b. Yazid had come from al-Qadisiyya. Ubayd Allah b.

Ziyad had sent al-Husayn b. Numayr and ordered him to take up (his) position at al-Qadisiyya. Then al-Hurr had been sent in advance with one thousand horsemen to meet al-Husayn.

Al-Hurr remained positioned opposite to al-Husayn, peace be on him, until the time for the midday prayer drew near. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, ordered al-Hajjaj b. Masruq to give the call to prayer. When the second call to prayer immediately preceding the prayer (iqama) was about (to be made) al-Husayn came out (before the people) dressed in a waist-cloth (izar) and cloak (rida’) and wearing a pair of sandals. He praised and glorified God, then he said:

People, I did not come to you until your letters came to me, and they were brought by your messengers (saying), ‘Come to us for we have no Imam. Through you may God unite us under guidance and truth.’

Since this was your view, I have come to you. Therefore give me what you guaranteed in your covenants and (sworn) testimonies. If you will not and (if you) are (now) averse to my coming, I will leave you (and go back) to the place from which I came.

They were silent before him. Not one of them said a word.

"Recite the iqama," he said to the caller for prayer (mu’adhdhin) and he recited the iqama.

"Do you want to lead your followers in prayer?" he asked al-Hurr b. Yazid.

"No,"he replied, "but you pray and we will pray (following the lead of) your prayer."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, prayed before them. Then he returned (to his tent) and his followers gathered around him. Al-Hurr went back to the place where he had positioned (his men) and entered a tent which had been put up for him. A group of his followers gathered around him while the rest returned to their ranks, which they had been in and which now they went back to. Each of them held the reins of his mount and sat in the shade (of its body).

At the time for the afternoon (asr) prayer, al-Husayn, peace be on him, ordered his followers to prepare for departure. Then he ordered the call to be made, and the call for the asr prayer was made, and the iqama. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, came forward, stood and prayed. Then he said the final greeting (of the prayer) and turned his face towards them (al-Hurr's men). He praised and glorified God and said:

People, if you fear God and recognise the rights of those who have rights, God will be more satisfied with you. We are the House of Muhammad and as such are more entitled to the authority (wilaya) of this affair (i.e. the rule of the community) over you than these pretenders who claim what does not belong to them. They have brought tyranny and aggression among you. If you refuse (us) because you dislike (us) or do not know our rights, and your view has now changed from what came to us in your letters and what your messengers brought, then I will leave you.

"By God,"declared al-Hurr, "I know nothing of these letters and messengers which you mention."

"Uqba b. Siman,"al-Husayn, peace be on him, called to one of his followers, "bring out the two saddle-bags in which the letters to me are kept."

He brought out two saddle-bags which were full of documents, and they were put before him.

"We are not among those who wrote these letters to you,"said al-Hurr, "and we have been ordered that when we meet you we should not leave you until we have brought you to Kufa to 'Ubayd Allah."

"Death will come to you before that (happens),"al-Husayn, peace be on him, told him. Then he ordered his followers, "Get up and get mounted."

They got mounted and (then) waited until their women had been mounted,

"Depart,"he ordered his followers.

When they set out to leave, the men (with al-Hurr) got in between them and the direction they were going in.

"May God deprive your mother of you,"said al-Husayn, peace be on him, to al-Hurr, "what do you want?"

"If any of the Arabs other than you were to say that to me,"retorted al-Hurr, "even though he were in the

same situation as you, I would not leave him without mentioning his mother being deprived (of him), whoever he might be. But by God there is no way for me to mention your mother except by (saying) the best things possible.”

"What do you want?" al-Husayn, peace be on him, demanded.

"I want to go with you to the governor, Ubayd Allah," he replied.

"Then by God I will not follow you."

"Then by God I will not let you (go anywhere else)."

These statements were repeated three times, and when their conversation was getting more (heated) al-Hurr said: "I have not been ordered to fight you. I have only been ordered not to leave you until I come with you to Kufa. If you refuse (to do that), then take any road which will not bring you into Kufa nor take you back to Medina, and let that be a compromise between us while I write to the governor, 'Ubayd Allah. Perhaps God will cause something to happen which will relieve me from having to do anything against you. Therefore take this (road) here and bear to the left of the road (to) al Udhayb and al-Qadisiyya."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, departed and al-Hurr with his followers (also) set out travelling close by him, while al Hurr was saying to him:

Al-Husayn, I remind you (before) God to (think of) your life; for I testify that you will be killed if you fight.

"Do you think that you can frighten me with death?" said al-Husayn, peace be on him. "Could a worse disaster happen to you than killing me? I can only speak (to you) as the brother of al-Aws said to his cousin when he wanted to help the Apostle of God, may God bless him and grant him and his family peace. His cousin feared for him and said: 'Where are you going, for you will be killed?' but he replied:

I will depart for there is no shame in death for a young man, whenever he intends (to do what is) right and he strives like a Muslim,

(Who) has soothed righteous men through (the sacrifice of) his life, who has scattered the cursed and opposed the criminal.

If I live, I will not regret (what I have done) and if I die, I will not suffer. Let it be enough for you to live in humiliation and be reviled.

When al-Hurr heard that he drew away from him. He and his followers travelled on one side (of the road) while al-Husayn, peace be on him, travelled on the other, until they reached Udhayb al-Hijanat. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, went on to Qasr Bani Muqatil.

He stopped there and there a large tent had (already) been erected.

"Whose is that?"he asked.

"That belongs to Ubayd Allah b. al-Hurr al-Jufi,"he was told.

"Ask him to come to me,"he said.

The messenger went to him and said: "This is al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, and he asks you to come to him."

"We belong to God and to Him we shall return,"said 'Ubayd Allah. "By God, I only left Kufa out of dread that al-Husayn, peace be on him, would enter Kufa while I was there. By God, I do not want to see him, nor him to see me."

The messenger returned to him (al-H. usayn). Al-Husayn, peace be on him, rose and went over to him. He greeted him and sat down.

Then he asked him to go with him. Ubayd Allah b. al Hurr repeated what he had said before and sought to excuse himself from what he was asking him (to do).

"If you are not going to help us,"al-Husayn, peace be on him, said o him, "then be sure that you are not one of those who fight against us. For, by God, no one will hear our cry and not help us without being destroyed."

"As for that (fighting against you),"he replied, "it will never happen, if God, the Exalted, wishes."

Then al-Husayn, peace be on him, left him and continued to his camp. Towards the end of the night, he ordered his boys to get provisions of water. Then he ordered the journey (to continue). He set out from Qasr Bani Muqatil.

('Uqba b. Sim'an reported:)

We set out at once with him and he became drowsy while he was on his horse's back. He woke up, saying: "We belong to God and to Him we will return. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds."

He did that twice or three times, then his son, "Ali b. al-Husayn approached him and asked: "Why are you praising God and repeating the verse of returning to Him?"

"My son,"he answered, "I nodded off and a horseman appeared to me, riding a horse and he said: 'Men are travelling and the fates travel towards them.' Then I knew it was our own souls announcing our deaths to us."

"Father,"asked (the youth), "does God regard you as evil? Are we not in the right?"

"Indeed (we are),"he answered, "by Him to Whom all His servants must return."

"Father," said (the youth), "then we need have no concern, if we are going to die righteously."

"May God give you the best reward a son can get for (his behavior towards) his father," answered al-Husayn, peace be on him.

In the morning, he stopped and prayed the morning prayer. Then he hurried to remount and to continue the journey with his followers, veering to the left with the intention of separating from (al-Hurr's men). However al-Hurr b. Yazid came towards him and stopped him and his followers (from going in that direction) and he began to (exert pressure to) turn them towards Kufa, but they resisted him. So they stopped (doing that) but they still accompanied them in the same way until they reached Ninawa, (which was) the place where al-Husayn, peace be on him, stopped.

Suddenly there appeared a rider on a fast mount, bearing weapons and carrying a bow on his shoulder, coming from Kufa. They all stopped and watched him. When he reached them, he greeted al-Hurr and his followers and did not greet al-Husayn and his followers. He handed a letter from Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad to al-Hurr. In it (was the following):

When this letter reaches you and my messenger comes to you, make al-Husayn come to a halt. But only let him stop in an open place without vegetation. I have ordered my messenger to stay with you and not to leave you until he brings me (news of) your carrying out my instructions.

Greetings.

When al-Hurr had read the letter, he told them: "This is a letter from the governor Ubayd Allah. He has ordered me to bring you to a halt at a place which his letter suggests. This is his messenger and he has ordered him not to leave me until I carry out the order with regard to you."

Yazid (b. Ziyad) b. al-Muhajir al-Kindi who was with al-Husayn, peace be on him, looked at the messenger of Ibn Ziyad and he recognized him.

"May your mother be deprived of you," he exclaimed, "what a business you have come to!"

"I have obeyed my Imam and remained faithful to my pledge of allegiance," (the other man) answered.

You have been disobedient to your Lord and have obeyed your Imam in bringing about the destruction of your soul," responded Ibn al-Muhajir. "You have acquired (eternal) shame (for yourself) and (the punishment of) Hell-fire. What a wicked Imam your Imam is! Indeed God has said: we have made them Imams who summon (people) to Hellfire and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped. (XXVIII, 41) Your Imam is one of those.

Al-Hurr b. Yazid began to make the people stop in a place that was without water and where there was no village.

"Shame upon you, let us stop at this village or that one," said al-Husayn, peace be on him. He meant by this, Ninawa and al-Ghadiriyya, and by that, Shufayya."

"By God, I cannot do that," replied (al-Hurr), "for this man has been sent to me as a spy."

"Son of the Apostle of God," said Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, "I can only think that after what you have seen, the situation will get worse than what you have seen. Fighting these people, now, will be easier for us than fighting those who will come against us after them. For by my life, after them will come against us such (a number) as we will not have the power (to fight) against."

"I will not begin to fight against them," answered al-Husayn.

That was Thursday, 2nd of (the month of) Muharram in the year 61 A.H.(680). On the next day, Umar b. Sad b. Abi Waqqas, set out from Kufa with four thousand horsemen. He stopped at Ninawa and sent for 'Urwa b. Qays al-Ahmasi and told him: "Go to him (al-Husayn) and ask him: What brought you, and what do you want?"

Urwa was one of those who had written to al-Husayn, peace be on him, and he was ashamed to do that. The same was the case with all the leaders who had written to him, and all of them refused and were unwilling to do that. Kathir b. Abd Allah al-Shabi stood up – he was a brave knight who never turned his face away from anything – and said: "I will go to him. By God, if you wish, I will rush on him."

"I don't want you to attack him," said 'Umar, "but go to him and ask him what has brought him."

As Kathir was approaching him, Abu Thumama al-Saidi saw him and said to al-Husayn, "May God benefit you, Abu Abd Allah, the wickedest man in the land, the one who has shed the most blood and the boldest of them all in attack, is coming towards you."

Then (Abu Thumama) stood facing him and said: "Put down your sword."

"No, by God," he replied, "I am only a messenger. If you will listen to me, I will tell you (the message) which I have been sent to bring to you. If you refuse, I will go away."

"I will take the hilt of your sword," answered (Abu Thumama), "and you can say what you need to."

"No, by God, you will not touch it," he retorted.

"Then tell me what you have brought and I will inform him for you. But I will not let you go near him, for you are a charlatan."

They both (stood there and) cursed each other. Then (Kathir) went back to Umar b. Sad and told him the news (of what had happened).

Umar summoned Qurra b. Qays al-Hanzali and said to him: "Shame upon you Qurra, go and meet al-

Husayn and ask him what brought him and what he wants."

Qurra began to approach him. When al-Husayn, peace be on him, saw him approaching, he asked: "Do you know that man?"

"Yes," replied Habib b. Muzahir, "he is from the Hanzala clan of Tamim. He is the son of our sister. I used to know him as a man of sound judgement. I would not have thought that he would be present at this scene."

He came and greeted al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then he informed him of 'Umar b. Sa'd's message.

"The people of this town of yours wrote to me that I should come," answered al-Husayn, peace be on him. "However, if now you have come to dislike me, then I will leave you."

"Shame upon you, Qurra," Habib b. Muzahir said to him, "will you return to those unjust men? Help this man through whose fathers God will grant you (great) favour."

"I will (first) return to my leader with the answer to his message," replied Qurra, "and then I will reflect on my views."

He went back to 'Umar b. Sa'd and gave him his report. "I hope that God will spare me from making war on him and fighting against him," said 'Umar and then he wrote to 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad:

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

I am (writing this from) where I have positioned myself, near al-Husayn, and I have asked him what brought him and what he wants. He answered: 'The people of this land wrote to me and their messengers came to me asking me to come and I have done so. However if (now) they have some to dislike me and (the position) now appears different to them from what their messengers brought to me, I will go away from them.

(Hassan b. Qa'id al-'Absi reported:)

I was with 'Ubayd Allah when this letter came to him, he read it and then he recited:

Now when our claws cling to him, he hopes for escape but he will be prevented (now) from (getting) any refuge.

He wrote to 'Umar b. Sa'd:

Your letter has reached me and I have understood what you mentioned. Offer al-Husayn (the opportunity) of him and all his followers pledging allegiance to Yazid. If he does that, we will then see what our judgement will be.

When the answer reached Umar b. Sa'd, he said: "I fear that 'Ubayd Allah will not accept that I should be spared (fighting al-Husayn)."

(Almost immediately) after it, there came (another) letter from Ibn Ziyad (in which he said):

Prevent al-Husayn and his followers from (getting) water.

Do not let them taste a drop of it just as was done with 'Uthman b. Affan.

At once Umar b. Said sent Amr b al-Hajjaj with five hundred horsemen to occupy the path to the water and prevent al-Husayn and his followers from (getting) water in order that they should (not) drink a drop of it. That was three days before the battle against al-Husayn, peace be on him.

Abd Allah b. al-Husayn al-Azdi, who was numbered among Bajila, called out at the top of his voice: "Husayn, don't you see that the water is as if in the middle of heaven. By God, you will not taste a drop of it until you die of thirst."

"O God, make him die of thirst and never forgive him", cried al-Husayn, peace be on him.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/shiite-encyclopedia/tragedy-karbala-reported-sunnis-part-5#comment-0>