

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 8

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan turned back against them but (some) of his men were killed and the rest retreated to their positions. (The number) of killed was apparent among the followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, because of the fewness of their number while it was not so apparent among the followers of 'Umar b. Sa'd because of their great number. The battle (continued to be) fought fiercely and desperately. The number killed and wounded among the followers of Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn, peace be on him, continued to grow until the sun began to decline. Al-Husayn and his companions prayed the prayer according to the rite of the prayer of fear.

Hanzala b. Sa'd al-Shibami advanced in front of al-Husayn, peace be on him, and called out:

People of Kufa, O people fear for you the same (that happened) on the Day of Parties. If earforyou on the Day of Summoning (XL: 30,32). O people, do not kill al-Husayn, for God will destroy you with punishment. He who forges a lie will be disappointed. (XX, 61)

He advanced and fought until he was killed, may God have mercy on him. After that, Shawdhab, retainer (mawla) of Shakir, went forward, (after saying): "Greetings, Abu 'Abd Allah and may God store his mercy and blessings for you."

He fought until he was killed, may God have mercy on him. Then came Abis b. Shabib al-Shakiri. He greeted al-Husayn, peace be on him, and fought until he was killed. Each man of (al-Husayn's) followers continued to go forward and be killed until there only remained with al-Husayn, peace be on him, the members of his own House.

His son, 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them, whose mother was Layla daughter of Abu Murra b. Urwa b. Masud al-Thaqafi, was (the next) to advance. He was one of the most handsome men of the time. On

that day he was nineteen years of age. He attacked the enemy declaring:

I am 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Ali. By the House of God, we are those rightly (endowed) with the Prophet. God, the son of a spurious son will not judge us. I will strike with my sword in defence of my father. I will strike with the blow of a Hashimi, a Qurayshi.

He did that several times, and the Kufans were afraid to kill him.

Then Murra b. Munqidh al-Abdi saw him. He said: "May the felonies of the Arabs come on me, if he gets past me doing the same as he has been doing, (and) if I do not deprive his mother of him."

('Ali b. al-Husayn) continued to attack the enemy as he had been doing but then Murra b. Munqidh came against him and stabbed him. He was struck down and the enemy fell upon him, cutting him with their swords. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, went out until he stood over him and said:

May God kill (the) people who killed you, my son. How fool hardy they are against the Merciful and in violating the sacredness of the family of the Apostle, may God bless him and his family.

His eyes filled with tears and he said: "There will (only) be dust on the world after you."

Zaynab, the sister of al-Husayn, peace be on him, came hurrying out, crying: "My brother, my nephew!"

She came up and threw herself on (her dead nephew). Al-Husayn raised her head and then led her back to the tent. He told his young (sons): "Carry your brother back."

They carried him and put him before the tent which they had been fighting in front of. (Then) one of 'Umar b. Sa'd's men called 'Amr b. Subayh shot an arrow at 'Abd Allah b. Muslim b. Aqil. Abd Allah put his hand to guard his brow. The arrow struck his hand and penetrated through his brow, and riveted the hand to it. He was not able to move it when another man came down on him with a spear, thrust it into his heart, and killed him.

Abd Allah b. Qutba al-Ta'i attacked Awn b. 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far b. Abi Talib and killed him.

Amir b. Nashhal al-Tamimi attacked Muhammad b. Abd Allah b. Ja'far b. Abi Talib and killed him.

Uthman b. Khalid al-Hamdani launched himself against 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Aqil b. Abi Talib, and killed him.

(Humayd b. Muslim reported:)

It was like that among us (i.e. many of al-Husayn's supporters had been killed by 'Umar b. Sa'd's army) when a young lad came out against us. His face was young like the first splinter of the new moon and he carried a sword. He was wearing a shirt and a waistcloth (izar), and a pair of sandals, one of whose straps was broken. 'Umar b. Sa'd b. Nufayl al-Azdi said to me: "let me attack him." I said:

Praise be to God, what do you want to do that for? Leave him. While even one of the family of al-Husayn remains, that will be enough to take vengeance on you for his (death).

But he insisted: "By God, let me attack him."

So he rushed against him and did not turn back until he had struck his head with his sword and split it in two. The young lad fell face downwards and he called out: "O uncle!"

At this, al-Husayn, peace be on him, showed himself just like the hawk shows itself. He launched into attack like a raging lion and struck Umar b. Sad b. Nufayl with his sword. That man tried to fend off the blow with his arm but his arm was cut off from the elbow, and he gave a great shriek (of pain) which was (even) heard by the people in the camp. As al-Husayn, peace be on him, turned away from him, the cavalry of Kufa attacked in order to save him but they (only succeeded) in trampling him to death beneath the horses' hooves, and the dust rose.

I saw al-Husayn, peace be on him, standing by the head of the young lad, looking at his feet and al-Husayn, peace be on him was saying:

May the people who have caused your death perish. For the one who will oppose them on the Day of Resurrection on your behalf will be your grandfather ('Ali, or great grandfather, i.e. the Prophet).

Then he continued:

By God, it is hard on your uncle that you called him and he did not answer you, or rather he answered but your cry was (too late) to help you. For by God, those who kill his relatives are many but those who help him are few.

Then he carried him in his arms. It is just as if (even now) I am looking at the two legs of the boy making marks (as they trail) on the ground. He took him and put him with his son, "Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them both, and the other members of the household who had been slain. I asked about the boy and was told that he was al-Qasim b. al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, peace be on them.

Then al-Husayn, peace be on him, sat in front of the tent. He brought his son, 'Abd Allah b. al-Husayn, peace be on him, who was (just) a baby and sat him on his knee. But one of the Banu Asad shot an arrow which slaughtered the child. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, caught the child's blood in the palm of his hand. When his palm was full, he poured (the blood) on to the ground and said:

O Lord, if it be so that You have kept the help of Heaven from us, then let it be because (Your purpose) is better than (immediate help). Take vengeance on these people who are (such) oppressors.

Then he carried the child and laid him with the (other) members of his household who had been slain.

(Just then) Abd Allah b. Uqba al-Ghanawi shot an arrow at Abu Bakr b. al-Hasan b. 'Ali, peace be on

them, and killed him. When al-Abbas b. 'Ali saw the number of his family who had been killed, he said to his brothers on his mother's side, Abd Allah, Ja'far and Uthman:

My brothers through my mother, go forward so that I may see that you have remained true to God and His Apostle. For you have no children (to defend).

Abd Allah, may God have mercy on him, advanced and fought fiercely. He exchanged blows with Hani' b. Shabib al-Hadrami and Hani' killed him. After him Ja'far went forward and Hani' also killed him. Khawali b. Yazid al-Asbahi, may God curse him, went against Uthman who had taken the place of his brother. He fired an arrow at him and brought him down. One of the Banu Darim attacked him (while he was down) and cut off his head.

The group then launched an attack against al-Husayn, peace be on him, and cut off his access to his camp. His thirst became severe, and he set off towards the dam, trying to reach the Euphrates. In front of him was his brother, al-'Abbas. However, the calvary of Ibn Sa'd, may God curse him, blocked his route. Among these was a man from

the Banu Darim; he said to (the cavalry):

Woe upon you! Prevent him from reaching the Euphrates, don't let him get water.

Then al-Husayn, peace be on him, cried out: "O God, I am thirsty." The Dariml became angry and shot an arrow at him which lodged in his throat. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, pulled out the arrow and held his hand below his throat. Both his palms were filled with blood which he shook away, then he said:

O God, I complain to You about what is being done to the son of the daughter of Your Prophet.

Then he returned to his position, while his thirst had become (even more) severe.

Meanwhile the people had surrounded al-Abbas and cut him off from (al-Husayn). Single-handed he began to attack them until he was killed, may God have mercy on him. The two who took part in killing him were Zayd b. Warqa al-Hanafi and Hahm b. al-Tufail al-Shabsi, after he had been covered with wounds and could not move.

(The account of al Abbas death is missing from Tabari)

When al-Husayn, peace be on him, came back from the dam to his tents, Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan advanced towards him with a group of his followers and surrounded him. The fastest of them was a man called Malik b. al-Nusayr al-Kindi. He cursed al-Husayn, peace be on him, and struck him on the head with his sword. (Al-Husayn) was wearing a cap. (The sword) went through it right into his head and made it bleed. The cap was filled with blood.

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, said to him:

May you never eat or drink with your right hand! May God gather you (on the Day of Judgement) with those people who are wrong-doers.

Then he threw away the cap and called for a cloth which he tied around his head. Then he called for another cap, put it on and bound it (in place).

(The above portion is missing from the account of Tabari)

Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan and those who were with him had withdrawn from him to their (earlier) positions. After a short delay they came again against him and surrounded him. 'Abd Allah b. al-Hasan b. Alieace be on them, came out against them, he was only a boy, not yet mature enough to leave the women. He rushed forward until he stood beside his uncle, al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then Zaynab, the daughter of 'Ali, peace be on him, came after him to stop him, and al Husayn, peace be on him, told her to stop him. However he refused (to take any notice of her) and determinedly prevented her (from taking him away). He said: "By God, I will not leave my uncle."

(At this) Abjar b. Ka'b rushed towards al-Husayn, peace be on him. With sword (in hand), the young lad said to him: "Woe upon you, you son of an impure woman, are you trying to kill my uncle?"

Abjar struck at him with his sword. The boy tried to fend off (the blow) with his arm. The sword cut through (his arm) to the skin (on the other side). There was the arm hanging (by the skin). The boy cried out: "O my mother!" Al-Husayn took hold of him and embraced him. He said to him:

My nephew, try to bear what has come to you and be comforted with the news that God will unite you with your righteous ancestors.

Then al-Husayn, peace be on him, raised his hand and said:

O God, even as You have made life pleasant for them for a time, divide them into factions and make them follow the ways of factions and let their rulers never be pleased with them. They summoned us so that they might support us and then they became hostile to us and killed us.

(Abjar is mentioned as Bahr in Tabari)

The foot-soldiers launched an attack from right and left against those who were left with al-Husayn, peace be on him, until only a group of three or four remained with him. When al-Husayn, peace be on him saw that, he called for a pair of dazzling Yemen trousers (sarawil). He tore them and put them on. He tore them so that he should not have them plundered after he had been killed. When al-Husayn, peace be on him, was killed, Abjar b. Kab set on him, plundered him of the trousers and left him naked. After that the two hands of Abjar b. Ka'b, may God curse him, became so dry in the summer that they were like sticks and then soaking wet in the winter so that they sprinkled drops of water and puss, until God destroyed him.

When nobody except a group of three members of his family was left with al-Husayn, peace be on him, he moved against the people, while the three protected him until (all) three were killed. Al-Husayn, was left alone. Despite being weighed down by wounds in his head and body, he began to strike against them with his sword and they scattered, to right and left, away from him.

Then Humayd b. Muslim said:

By God, I have never seen such persistence. His sons have been killed, and the members of his household and his followers, yet he is still as brave as ever and he has not allowed his spirit to leave him. When the soldiers attack him, he fights back with his sword and scatters them to right and left of him like goats when a wolf comes upon them.

When Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan realised (the position), he called for the cavalry and they came up at the rear of the foot-soldiers. He ordered the archers to shoot at (al-Husayn) and they showered him with arrows until he became (quilted with arrows) like a hedgehog (iZ with spikes).

He drew back from them and they stood facing him. His sister Zaynab, came to the door of the tent and called out to 'Umar b. Sad b. Abi Waqqas: "Woe upon you, Umar. Is Abu Abd Allah being killed while you (stand by and) watch?" But Umar did not answer. Then she called out: "Woe upon you (all), is there not a Muslim among you?" But no-one answered.

Then Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan shouted at the foot soldiers and the Calvary: "Why are you waiting for the man? May your mothers be deprived of you!" So they attacked him from every side. Zura b. Sharik struck him on the left shoulder-blade and cut into it. Another of them struck him on the shoulder.

He fell prostrate on his face. Sinan b. Anas al-Nakhai stabbed him with a spear and killed him. Khawali b. Yazid al-Asbahi hurried to him and bent down to cut off his head but he trembled (too much). Shamir said to him: "May God crush your arm why are you trembling?" Then Shamir bent down and decapitated him. He lifted the head (and handed it) to Khawati saying: "Take it to the commander 'Umar b. Sa'd."

Then they began to plunder (the body of) al-Husayn, peace be on him. Ishaq b. al-Hayat al-Hadrami, may God curse him, took his shirt. Abjar b. Ka'b, may God curse him, took his trousers. Akhnas b. Marthad, may God curse him, took his turban. One of the Banu Darim took his sword. They plundered his saddle and his camel and they looted his womenfolk.

(The name of the plunderers and the plundered objects are different in Tabari)

(Humayd b. Muslim reported:)

By God, I did not see one of his women or daughters or the women of his family who did not have her clothes ripped from her back, taken away and removed from her forcibly. Then we came to 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them both. He was stretched out on a bed and he was very ill. Shamir had a group of foot-soldiers with him and they asked him, "Shall we kill this sick one?" I said: "Praise be to God, will

boys be killed (too)? This is only a youth even though he is what he is.”And I went on (arguing) until I had moved them away from him.

Then ‘Umar b. Sa’d arrived and the women cried out and wept in his face. He ordered his followers: "None of you should enter the tents of these women nor disturb this sick boy."The women asked him to return what had been taken from them so that they could clothe themselves again. So he commanded that whoever had taken any of their belongings should return them to them. But by God, none of them returned anything. He then entrusted charge of the main tent and the tents of the women to a group (of men) who were; with him. He said: "Guard (the women) so that none of them may leave and do not harm them."

After this, he returned to his tent and called out to his followers:

"Who will volunteer (to go) to al-Husayn and make his horse trample on (al-Husayn’s body)?"Ten volunteered. Of these, Ishaq b. Hayyat and Akhnas b. Marthad trampled on (the body of) al-Husayn with their horses until they had broken and bruised his back. Umar b. Sad despatched on that day—it was the day of ‘Ashura’, – the head of al-Husayn, peace be on him, with Khawali b. Yazid al-Asbahi and Humayd b. Muslim al-Azdi, to Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad.

Then he ordered the heads of the remainder of his followers and members of his House (who had been slain) to be cut off. There were seventy-two heads. He sent Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan, Qays b. Ash’ath and Amr b. al-Hajjaj with these. They journeyed until they brought them to Ibn Ziyad. He (‘Umar b. Sad) remained there for the rest of that day and the next day until just after midday.

Then he summoned the people for the journey, and set out towards Kufa. He took with him the daughters and sisters of al-Husayn, peace be on him, together with “Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on him. The latter was still sick with a dysentery and was almost on the point of death.

When Ibn Sad departed, some of Banu Asad, who had been staying at al-Ghadiyya went to al-Husayn, peace be on him, and his followers. They performed the funeral prayer over them. Then they buried al-Husayn at the place where his tomb still is, and they buried his son “Ali b. al-Husayn al-Asghar (the younger) at the foot of the body. They dug around the area next to the two feet of al-Husayn, peace be on him, for the martyrs from his House and his followers.

They gathered them together and buried them all together. However, they buried al-Abbas b. “Ali, peace be on them both, in the place where he was killed, on the road to al-Ghadiyya, where his tomb still is.

(These details are not given by Tabari)

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