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Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis Part 6

بِسْمِ اللَّـهِ الرَّحْمَـٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(Humayd b Muslim reported:)

By God, later I visited him when he was ill. By God, other than Whom there is no deity, I saw him drinking water without being able to quench his thirst, and then vomiting. He would cry out, "The thirst, the thirst!"Again he would drink water without being able to quench his thirst, again he would vomit. He would then burn with thirst. This went on until he died, God curse him.

When al-Husayn saw the extent of the number of troops encamped with 'Umar b. Sa'd, may God curse him, at Ninawa in order to do battle against him, he sent to 'Umar b. Sa'd that he wanted to meet him. The two men met at night and talked together for a long time.

(When) 'Umar b. Sa'd went back to his camp, he wrote to Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, may he be cursed.

God has put out the fire of hatred, united (the people) in one opinion (lit. word), and set right the affairs of the community. This man, al-Husayn, has given me a promise that he will return to the place which he came from, or he will go to one of the border outposts - he will become like any (other) of the Muslims, with the same rights and duties as them; or he will go to Yazid, the Commander of the faithful, and offer him his hand and see (if the difference) between them (can be reconciled). In this (offer) have the consent (to what you have demanded) and the community gains benefit.

When Ubayd Allah read the letter, he said: "This is the letter about a sincere man who is anxious for his people."

"Are you going vo accept this from him,"demanded Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan, jumping up,

When he has encamped on your land nearby? By God if he was a man from your land and he would not

put his hand in yours, whether he was in a position of power and strength (or) whether he was in a position of weakness and impotence you would not give this concession, for it would be (a mark) of weakness. Rather let him and his followers submit to your authority.

Then if you punish them, (it will be because) you are the (person) appropriate to punish, and if you forgive them, you have the right (to do so)."

"What you have suggested is good,"replied Ibn Ziyad. "Your view is the correct view. Take this message to 'Umar b. Sad and let him offer al-Husayn and his followers (the opportunity of) submitting to my authority. If they do that, let him send them to me in peace. If they refuse, he should fight them. If he ('Umar b. Sa'd) acts (according to) my instructions, then listen to him and obey him. However if he refuses to fight them then you are the commander of the army (lit. people), attack him, cut his head off and send it to me."

Then he wrote to Umar b. Sa'd:

I did not send you to al-Husayn for you to restrain yourself from (fighting) him, nor to idle the time away with him, nor to promise him peace and preservation (of his life), nor to make excuses for him, nor to be an intercessor on his behalf with me. Therefore see that if al-Husayn and his followers submit to my authority and surrender, you send them to me in peace. If they refuse,v then march against them to fight them and to punish them; for they deserve that.

If al-Husayn is killed, make the horses trample on his body, both front and back; for he is a disobedient rebel, and I do not consider that this will be zany way wrong after death. But it is my view that you should do this to him if you kill him. If you carry out your command concerning him, we will give you the reward due to one who is attentive and obedient. If you refuse, then we withdraw (the command of) our province and army from you and leave the army to Shamir b. Dhl al-Jawshan. We have given him our authority.

Greetings.

Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan brought the letter to 'Umar b. Sad. After he had brought it and read it, 'Umar said to him:

Shame upon you, what is this to you? May God never show favour to your house. May God make abominable what you have brought to me! By God, I did not think that you would cause him to refuse what I had written to him, and ruin for us a matter which we had hoped to set right. Al Husayn will not surrender, for there is a spirit like (his) father's in his body."

"Tell me what you are going to do,"demanded Shamir. "Are you going to carry out the governor's command and fight his enemy or are you going to leave the command of the army to me?"

"No, (there is going to be) no advantage to you. I will carry that out instead of you. you take command of

the foot-soldiers."

'Umar b. Sa'd prepared to (do battle with) al-Husayn, peace be on him, on the night of Thursday, 9th of the month of Muharram. (In the meantime) Shamir went out and stood in front of the followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him.

"Where are my sister's sons?"he demanded. Al Abbas, Jafar, Abd Allah and Uthman, sons of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, peace be on him, came forward.

"What do you want?"they asked.

"Sons of my sister, you are guaranteed security,"he said. "God curse you and curse the security which you offer without offering itlto the son of the Apostle of God,"the young men replied.

"Cavalry of God, mount and announce the news of Heaven (i.e. death),"Umar b. Sa'd called out and the people mounted and he approached (the supporters of al-Husayn) after the afternoon (asr) prayer.

Meanwhile, al-Husayn, peace be on him, was sitting in front of his tent dozing with his head on his knees. His sister heard the clamour (from the enemy's ranks). She came up to him and said, "My brother, don't you hear the sounds which are getting nearer?"

I have just seen the Apostle of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, in my sleep,"said al-Husayn, peace be on him, as he raised his head. "He said to me: 'You are coming to us.'

His sister struck at her face and cried out in grief.

"You have no (reason) to lament, sister,"al-Husayn, peace be on him, told her. "Be quiet, may God have mercy on you."

Then he turned to al-Abbas b. 'Ali "Brother, the enemy have come, so get ready; but first, al-Abbas, you, yourself, ride out to meet them, to talk to them about what they have (in mind) and what appears (appropriate) to them and to ask about what has brought them (against us)."

Al-Abbas went towards them with about twenty horsemen, among whom was Zuhayr b. al-Qayn.

"How do you see (the situation)?"he asked. "What do you want?'

"The command of the governor has arrived that we should offer you (the opportunity of) submitting to his authority, otherwise we (must) attack you,"they answered.

"Do not hurry (to do anything) until I have gone back to Abu Abd Allah (al-Husayn) and told him what you have said, 'Abbas requested.

They stopped (where they were) and told him: "Go to him and inform him, and tell us what he says to

you.”

Al ‘Abbas went galloping back to al Husayn, peace be on him, to give him the information. While his companions remained exchanging words with the enemy, trying to test them and dissuade them from fighting against al-Husayn, peace be on him, (al-’Abbas) told him what the enemy had said.

Go back to them,”he, peace be on him, said, "if you can, delay them until the morning and (persuade) them to keep from us during the evening. Then, perhaps, we may be able to pray to our Lord during the night to call upon Him and seek His forgiveness. He knows that I have always loved His formal prayer, the recitation of His Book and (making) many invocations to Him, seeking His forgiveness.

Al Abbas went back to the people, and returned (after) being with them, accompanied by a messenger on behalf of Umar b. Saed, who had said: "We will grant you a day until tomorrow. Then if you surrender, we will send you to our governor, Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad but if you refuse we will not leave you (any longer).”

(After) he departed, towards the evening al-Husayn gathered his followers around him.

(‘Ali b. al Husayn, Zayn al Abidin, reported:)

I went near to hear what he would say to them (even though) at that time I was sick. I heard my father say to his followers: I glorify God with the most perfect glorification and I praise Him in happiness and misfortune. O God, I praise You for blessing us with prophethood, teaching us the Qur’an and making us understand the religion. You have given us hearing, sight and hearts, and have made us among those who give thanks (to You). I know of no followers more loyal and more virtuous than my followers, nor of any House more pious and more close-knit than my House. May God reward you well on my behalf. Indeed, I do not think that there will be (any further) days (left) to us by these men. I permit you to leave me. All (of you) go away with the absolution of your oath (to follow me), for there will be no (further) on you from me. This is a night (whose darkness) will give cover to you. Use it as a camel (i.e. ride away in it).

His brothers and sons, the sons of his sisters and the sons of ‘Abd Allah b. Ja’far said:

We will not leave you to make ourselves continue living after your (death). God will never see us (do) such a thing.

Al Abbas b. ‘Ali, peace be on them, was the first of them to make this declaration. Then the (whole) group followed him, (all) declaring the same thing.

"Sons of ‘Aqil”said al-Husayn, "enough of your (family) has been killed. So go away as I have permitted you."

"Glory be to God,”they replied, "what would the people say?

They would say that we deserted our shaykh, our lord, the sons of our uncle, who was the best of uncles; that we had not shot arrows alongside them, we had not thrust spears alongside them, we had not struck swords alongside them. At such an accusation) we do not know what we would do. No, by God, we will not do (such a thing). Rather we will ransom you with our lives, property and families. We will fight for you until we reach your destination. May God make life abominable (for us) after your (death)."

Then Muslim b. Awsaja arose and spoke:

Could we leave you alone? How should we excuse ourselves before God concerning the performance of our duty to your

By God, I will stab them with my spear (until it breaks), I will strike them with my sword as long as the hilt is in my hand. If I have no weapon (left) to fight them with, I will throw stones (at them). By God we will never leave you until God knows that we have preserved through you (the company of His Apostle) in his absence. By God, if I knew what I would die and then be revived and then burnt and then revived, and then scattered, and that would be done to me seventy times, I would never leave you until I met my death (fighting) on your behalf. So how could I do it when there
can only be one death, which is a great blessing which can never be rejected.

Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, may God have mercy on him, spoke:

By God, I would prefer to be killed and then recalled to life; and then be killed a thousand times in this manner; that in this way God, the Mighty and Exalted, should protect your life and the lives of these young men of your House.

All his followers spoke in similar vein, one after the other. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, called (on God to) reward them well and then went back to his tent.

('Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them, Zayn al Abidin reported:)

I was sitting on that evening (before the morning of the day) in which my father was killed. With me was my aunt, Zaynab, who was nursing me when my father left to go to his tent. With him was Juwayn, the retainer (mawla) of Abu Dharrr al-Ghiffarl, who was preparing his sword and putting it right My father recited:

Time, shame on you as a friend! At the day's dawning and the sun's setting,

How many a companion or seeker will be a corpse! Time will not be satisfied with any substitute. 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. I kept silent and knew that tribulation had come upon us. As for my aunt,

she heard what I heard – but she is a woman and weakness and grief are part of the qualities of women; she could not control herself, she jumped up, tearing at her clothes and sighing, and went to him.

"Then I will lose (a brother),"Zaynab said to him. "Would that death deprived me of life today, (for) my mother, Fatimah, is dead, and my father, 'Ah, and my brother, al-Hasan, peace be on them (all)."

"O sister,' al-Husayn said to her as he looked at her with his eyes full of tears, "don't let Satan take away your forbearance.

(Remember:) If the sandgrouse are left (alone) at night, they will sleep (i.e. let nature take its course)."

"O my grief, your life will be violently wrenched from you and that is more wounding to my heart and harsher to my soul,"she lamented, and then she struck at her face. she bent down to (the hem of) her garment and (began to) tear it. Then she fell down in a faint.

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, got up and bathed her face with water

Then he said to her:

Sister, fear God and take comfort in the consolation of God. Know that the people on the earth will die and the inhabitants of heaven will not continue to exist (for ever). For everything will be destroyed except the face of God Who created creation by His power (qudra); He sends forth creatures and He causes them to return; He is unique and alone. My grandfather was better than me, my father was better than me and my mother was better than me. I and every Muslim have an ideal model in the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family.

By This and the like he tried to console her and he said:

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 with grief and loss when I am destroyed.

Then he brought her and made her sit with me. He went out to his followers and ordered them to bring their tents (much) closer together so that the tent-pegs came within the area of each other's tents, and so that if they remained among their tents, the enemy could only approach (them), from one side (for there would be) tents behind them, and to their right and left. Thus (the tents completely) surrounded them except for the one way which the enemy could come against them.

(After that) he, peace be on him, returned to his place and spent the whole night in performing the prayer, in calling on God's forgiveness and in making invocations. In the same way, his followers performed the prayer, made invocations and sought God's forgiveness.

(Al Dahhak b. Abd Allah reported:)

(A contingent of) Umar b. Sa'd's (continually) passed us keeping watch over us while al-Husayn,

himself, recited:

Let not those who disbelieve think that our giving them a delay is better for their souls. We give them a delay only that they might increase their wickedness. They shall have a disgraceful punishment. God does not leave the believers in the situation you are in until He has made the evil distinct from the good. (Qur'an III, 117/8)

A man called 'Abd Allah b. Samir, (who was) among those horsemen heard that. He was given to much laughter, and was a brave fighter, a treacherous knight and a noble. He cried out: "By the Lord of the Ka'ba, we are the good, we have been distinguished from you."

"O terrible sinner,"cried Burayr b. Hudayr, "has God made you one of the good?"

"A curse on you, whoever you are?"he shouted back.

"I am Burayr b. Hudayr,"he replied. And they both cursed each other.

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