

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 7

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the morning al Husayn, peace be on him, mobilised his followers after the morning prayer. He had with him thirty two horsemen and forty foot-soldiers. He put Zuhayr b. al-Qayn in charge of his right wing and Habib b. Muzahir in charge of his left wing, and he gave his standard to his brother, al-Abbas. They positioned themselves with the tents at the rear. He ordered (the) firewood and cane which was behind the tents to be left in a ditch which had been dug there and to be set on fire, fearing that they would attack them from the rear.

Umar b. Sad began the morning of that day – it was Friday, or Saturday as some say – by mobilising his followers. He went out with the men with him towards al-Husayn, peace be on him. ‘Amr b. al-Hajjaj was in command of his right wing, Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan of the left wing, Urwa b. Qays was in command of the cavalry,

Shabath b. Ribi of the foot-soldiers. He gave his standard to Durayd, his retainer (mawla).

(‘Ali b. al Husayn, Zayn al Abidin, peace be upon them, reported:)

When the cavalry began to approach al-Husayn, he raised his hands and said:

O God, it is You in W’hom I trust amid all grief. You are my hope amid all violence. You are my trust and provision in everything that happens to me, (no matter) how much the heart may seem to weaken in it, trickery may seem to diminish (my hope) in it, the friend may seem to desert (me) in it, and the enemy may seem to rejoice in it. It comes upon me through You and when I complain to You of it, it is because of my desire for You, You alone. You have comforted me in (everything) and have revealed its (significance to me). You are the Master of all grace, the Possessor of all goodness and the Ultimate Resort of all desire.

When the enemy began to move around the tent of al-Husayn, peace be on him, they saw the ditch behind and the fire burning the firewood and cane which had been thrown in it. (At this) Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan called out at the top of his voice:

Al-Husayn, are you hurrying towards the fire (of Hell) before the Day of Resurrection?

"Who is that?" asked al-Husayn, peace be on him. "(It sounds) like Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan?"

"Yes, (it is)," they told him.

"Son of a goat-herdess, you are more worthy to be burnt by that," he retorted.

Muslim b. Awsaja wanted to shoot an arrow at him, but al-Husayn, peace be on him, stopped him from (doing) that.

"Let me shoot at him" he asked, "for he is a wicked sinner, one of the enemies of God, and the great tyrants. (Now) God has made it possible (to kill) him."

"Do not shoot at him," ordered al-Husayn, peace be on him, "for I am unwilling to begin (the fighting) against them."

Then al-Husayn called for his mount and mounted it. He called out at the top of his voice:

O people of Iraq,

and most of them (began to) listen to him

People, listen to my words and do not hurry (to attack me) so that I may remind you of the duties you have towards me and so that (by telling you the true circumstances) I may free myself from any blame in (your attacking me). If you give me justice, you will become happier through that. If you do not give me justice of your own accord (as individuals), then agree upon your affairs (and your associates); let not your affair be in darkness to you. Then carry (it) out against me and do not reflect (any further) (X: 71). Indeed my guardian is God, Who created the Book, He takes care of the righteous (VII: 196)

Then he praised and glorified God, and mentioned what God is entitled to. He called for blessings on the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, and on the angels and (other) prophets. No speaker has ever been heard before or after him more eloquent in his speech than he was. He continued:

Trace back my lineage and consider who I am. Then look back at yourselves and remonstrate with yourselves. Consider whether it is right for you to kill me and to violate the honour of my womenfolk. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, of his testamentary trustee (wali) and his cousin, the first of the believers in God and the man who (first) believed in what His Apostle, may God bless him and his family, brought from his Lord? Was not Hamza, the lord of the martyrs, my uncle? Was not Ja'far, the one who flies in Heaven, my uncle? Have you not heard the words of the Apostle of God, may God bless

him and his family, concerning myself and my brother:

‘These are the two lords of the youths of the inhabitants of heaven’? Whether you believe what I am saying and it is the truth, for by God I have never told a lie since I learnt that God hated people (who told) them – or whether you regard me as a liar, there are among you those who, if you asked them, would tell you: Ask Jabir b. Abd Allah al- Ansari, Abu Said al-Khudri, Sahl b. Sad al-Saidi, Zayd b. Arqam and Anas b. Malik to tell you that they heard these words from the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, concerning myself and my brother. Is there not (sufficient) in this to prevent you shedding my blood?

"If I understand what you are saying,"interrupted Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan, "then I only worship God (very shakily) on the edge."

"I think that you worship God (very shakily) on seventy edges,"said Habib b. Muzahir. "For I testify that you are right. You do not understand what he is saying. For God has impressed (ignorance) upon your heart."

If you are in any doubt about this, al-Husayn, peace be on him, told them,

You are in doubt that I am the son of the daughter of your Prophet. By God there is no son of a prophet other than me among you and among the peoples from East to West. Shame on you, are you seeking retribution from me for one of your dead whom I have killed, or for property of yours which I expropriated, or for a wound which I have inflicted?

They did not say anything to him. They he called: "Shabath b. Ribi, Hajjar b. Abjar, Qays b. al-Ashath, Yazid b. al-Harith, didn't you write: 'The fruit has ripened; the dates have grown green; come to an army which has been gathered for you'?"

"We don't know what you are talking about,"said Qays b. al-Ashath. "Submit to the authority of your kinsmen (the Umayyads). They have never treated you with anything but what you liked."

"By God, I will never give you my hand like a man who has been humiliated; nor will I flee like a slave,"said al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then he called out,

O Servants of God, I take refuge in my Lord and your Lord from your stoning. (XLIV: 20)

I take refuge in my Lord and your Lord from every haughty man who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning. (XL: 27)

He made his mount kneel and ordered 'Uqba b. Sim'an to tie its reins. They (the Kufans) began to advance towards him (al-Husayn). When al-Hurr b. Yazid perceived that the people were determined to fight al-Husayn, peace be on him, he said to 'Umar: "Are you going to fight this man?"

"Yes," he replied, "it will be a terrible battle, the least part of which will be heads falling and severed hands flying (through the air)."

"Haven't you any other way of getting what you want?"

"If the matter rested with me," answered Umar, "I would do (anything else), but your governor has refused (any alternative)."

Al-Hurr went and stood apart from the people. With him was a man from his tribe called Qurra b. Qays.

"Qurra, have you watered your horse, today?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you want to water it?"

(Qurra reported (later):)

I thought that he (al-Hurr) was going to leave the battle, and did not want to be present at it but was unwilling to be seen when he (left). So I said: "I have not watered it and I was going to water it." Then I left him where he was. By God, if he had told me what he was intending to do, I would have gone with him to al-Husayn, peace be on him.

He (al-Hurr) began gradually to draw closer to al-Husayn.

"What do you want, Ibn Yazid?" asked Muhajir b. Aws, but he did not answer. (Instead) a great shudder came over him.

"Your behaviour is suspicious," said Muhajir. "By God, I have never seen you act like this before. If I was asked who was the bravest of the Kufans, I would not (normally) neglect (to mention) you. What is this I see in you, (today)?"

"By God, I am giving my soul the choice between Heaven and the fire (of Hell)," answered al-Hurr. "By God, I will not choose anything before Heaven, even though I am cut to pieces and burnt."

(With that) he whipped his horse and (galloped over) and joined al-Husayn, peace be on him.

May I be your ransom, son of the Apostle of God?, he said, I was your companion who stopped you from returning. I accompanied you along the road and made you stop in this place. But I did not think that the people would refuse to respond to what you have offered them and that they would ever come to this position I (which they have now come to) with regard to you. By God, if I had I known that they would finish up (by doing) what I am seeing (them do) to you, I would not have committed what I have committed against you. I repent to God for what I have done. Will you accept my repentance?

"Yes,"replied al-Husayn, peace be on him, "God will forgive you. So get down."

"You will have (no) horseman better than me, (nor), while I am on foot, any foot-soldier,"he said. "I will continue fighting on foot to the (bitter) end."

"Do so,"replied al-Husayn, peace be on him. "May God grant you mercy (though) what He has revealed to you."

He advanced, in front of al-Husayn, peace be on him, and called out:

People of Kufa, your mother(s) will be deprived of their sons and tears will come to their eyes. Have you summoned this righteous man (to come to you),then, when he has come to you, have you handed him over (to his enemies)? Did you claim that you would fight with your own lives for him, and then have you begun to attack him in order to kill him? You have laid hold of his life; you have seized his throat; you have encircled him on every side in order to prevent him returning to God's broad land (i.e. the Hijaz). He has come into your hands like a prisoner who no longer has the power to use his own life and cannot defend it against harm. You have prevented him, his womenfolk, his children and his people from (getting) the water of the Euphrates which Jews, Christians and Majians may drink, and which the pigs and dogs of Sawad drink. They (al-Husayn's family) are likely to die of thirst. How wickedly you have treated the offspring left by Muhammad. May God not give you water to drink on the Day of Thirst.

Some of the foot-soldiers attacked him by shooting arrows at him. He went and stood in front of al-Husayn, peace be on him.

"Durayd,"Umar b. Sad called out, "bring forward your standard (for us)."

He brought it forward. ('Umar) put an arrow in his bow and let it fly. He said, "(All of you) be witnesses of who was the first to shoot."

The people began to shoot at each other and to come forward (for single combat). Yasar, retainer (mawla) of Ziyad b. Abi Sufyan, came forward (from Umar's army). 'Abd Allah b. Umayr (al-Kalbi) came forward (from al-Husayn's ranks) to meet him.

"Who are you?"Yasar asked him, and (Ibn al-Kalbi) gave him his lineage.

"I do not know you,"(Yasar) answered. "Let Zuhayr b. al-Qayn or Habib b. Muzahir come out against me."

"Son of a prostitute, you wanted to do single combat with one of the people,"retorted Abd Allah b. Umayr (al-Kalbi).

With that (Ibn al-Kalbi) struck him with his sword until he had quietened him. While he was occupied

with striking against him, Salim, retainer (mawla) of 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, attacked him (Ibn al-Kalbi). Al-Husayn's followers cried out (in warning): "The (other) servant is closing in on you!" (Ibn al-Kalbi) did not notice (Salim) until the latter was upon him. With his left arm he warded off Salim's blow but the fingers of his hand were cut off. Then he turned on (Salim) and struck him and killed him. After (thus) killing them both, (Ibn al-Kalbi) came forward and recited:

If you do not know me, I am Ibn al-Kalbi: I am a man of bitterness and anger, I am not a weakling in the face of disaster.

Amr b. al-Hajjaj, with the Kufans under his command, launched an attack on the right wing of the supporters of al-Husayn, peace be on him. When they drew near, the followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, knelt down and pointed their spears at them. The (attackers) horses would not come forward against the spears and they swung round to retreat. The followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, began to shoot arrows at (the enemy), killing some of them and wounding others.

Abd Allah b. Hawza, one of the Banu Tamim, approached al-Husayn's camp and the people called out to him, "Where are you going, may your mother be deprived of you?"

"I am (in the right) advancing to a merciful Lord and an intercessor who is listened to (i.e. the Prophet)," he answered.

"Who is that?" al-Husayn, peace be on him, asked his followers.

"Ibn Hawza al-Tamimi" he was told.

"O God, drive him into the fire!" (al-Husayn) exclaimed. With that his horse upset him in its stride and fell. His left leg was stuck in the stirrups and his right leg was free. Muslim b. Awsaja attacked him and struck his right leg and cut it off. The horse galloped off (dragging) him (along) and his head struck every stone and clod of earth until he died. God hurried his soul to (Hell) fire. (More) fighting then broke out and more men were killed.

Al-Hurr b. Yazid attacked the followers of 'Umar b. Sa'd and (as he did so), he recited the words of 'Antara:

With my charger's neck and breast thrust forward I will launch myself at them again and again until (the beast) is clothed in blood.

Yazid b. Sufyan, from Banu al-Harith (of Tamim), came forward to meet him. Soon al-Hurr killed him.

(In the meantime) Nafi' b. Hilal came forward, declaring:

I am the son of Hilal. I believe in the religion of 'Ali. Muzahim b. Hurayth came against him, crying, "I follow the religion of Uthman."

"Rather you follow the religion of Satan," Nafi replied and attacked and killed him.

"You stupid fellows," Amr b. al-Hajjaj cried out to (his) men, "don't you realise whom you are fighting? (These) knights of the town are people who are seeking death. Don't let any of you go forward to fight them in single combat. They are only few and their time is running out. If you only threw stones at them, you would kill them (eventually)."

"True, you've come to the right conclusion," Umar b. Sad said to him. Then he sent (the message) to the commanders that none of their men should fight in single combat.

Amr b. al-Hajaj and his men launched an attack against al-Husayn, peace be on him, from the direction of the Euphrates. They fought together fiercely for a time. Muslim b. Awsaja was struck down, may God have mercy on him, (but) Amr and his men withdrew. When the dust settled, (al-Husayn's followers) found Muslim stretched out dying. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, walked towards him and he was on the point of death.

Muslim, may God have mercy on you, said (al-Husayn), of them (the believers) is he who has accomplished his vow, and of them is he who waits; they have not changed at all (XXXIII: 23)

Habib b. Muzahir approached and said, "Muslim, your death is hard for me to bear but I bring you good news of Heaven (where you are going)."

"May God bring you good news too," replied Muslim in a weak voice.

"Even if I knew that I would follow you at this very moment, I would still like you to appoint me to carry out everything which concerns you."

Then the people came again against al-Husayn, peace be on him.

Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan attacked with his left wing (and thrust at) (al-Husayn's) left wing, but they stood firm against him and forced him away (with their spears). Al-Husayn, peace be on him, and his followers were attacked on every side but the followers of al-Husayn fought fiercely. Then their cavalry began to attack and even though they were only thirty-two horsemen, they did not attack any side of the Kufan cavalry without putting it to flight.

When Urwa b. Qays saw that – he was in command of the Kufan cavalry – he sent word to 'Umar b. Sad: "Don't you see what my cavalry is receiving today from this small number (of men)? Send the foot-soldiers and archers against them."

He sent the archers against them. Al-Hurr b. Yazid's horse was lamed. He dismounted and began to shout:

You have lamed my (horse) but I am the son of freedom and braver than a maned lion.

He struck out against them with his sword but a great number came against him. Ayyub b. Musarrih and another of the Kufan horsemen shared in killing him.

The followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, continued to fight fiercely against the enemy until it was midday. When al-Husayn b. Numayr – he was in command of the archers – perceived the steadfastness of the followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, he advanced against his supporters with five hundred archers so that they showered the followers of al-Husayn, peace be on him, with arrows. They continued shooting at them until they had lamed (most of) their horses and wounded some of their men. Then they moved against them and a fierce battle was fought between them for some time. Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan (also) attacked them with his followers but Zuhayr b. al-Qayn with ten of the followers of al-Husayn (counter) attacked and drove them away from the tents.

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