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Why did Muslim ibn 'Aqil not kill 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad in Hani's House?

Historians have recounted: When Muslim ibn 'Aqil was informed that 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad had made a speech warning the people of Kufah not to follow him, Muslim ibn 'Aqil feared that the government agents would arrest and kill him. For this reason, he left Mukhtar's house and sought refuge in the house of Hani ibn 'Urwah Madhhaji, a strong and proud Shi'ah. Hani was one of the nobles of Kufah and a renowned reciter of the Holy Qur'an in that part of the Muslim World.

He was also a *shaykh* and spokesman of a religious group that had pledged allegiance of brotherhood to one another and formed what they called a 'religious clan'. He had four thousand mounted soldiers and eight thousand ground troops at his command. In addition, if we take the contributions of his allies (in times of need) into consideration, his troops would reach thirty thousand able and willing fighters.

He was considered to be one of the closest people to Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as). He had participated in all the three wars which were imposed on Imam 'Ali (as). He had also had a limited personal experience with the Holy Prophet (S) and understood well the era of the Holy Prophet (S).

Muslim ibn 'Aqil sought refuge in Hani's house. At that time, there was someone else in Hani's house. His name was Sharik ibn 'Abd Allah A'war Harithi. He was one of the highly respectable and renowned Shi'ahs of Imam 'Ali (as) in Basrah. He was very honorable and considered to be a great man among the companions.

He had taken part in the Battle of Siffin and had been seen fighting alongside 'Ammar ibn Yasir. Sharik ibn 'Abd Allah and Hani ibn 'Urwah were very close and special friends. While Sharik ibn 'Abd Allah was in Hani's house, he became very ill. 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad came to visit this sick person in Hani's house.

Before Ibn Ziyad had arrived, Sharik ibn 'Abd Allah addressed Muslim ibn 'Aqil in this way, "Your aim and the aims of your Shi'ahs is to bring 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad to perdition. Therefore, hide yourself in

that secret closet over there. Whenever you feel certain that he has arrived, leave your secret hiding place and come forward to kill him. I will guarantee your safety."

When they were still discussing this, it was said that the governor (‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad) had arrived at the doorstep. Muslim ibn ‘Aqil hid himself in the closet and a while later ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad came in to visit Sharik ibn ‘Abd Allah.

After waiting for some time, Sharik noticed that Muslim ibn ‘Aqil was not coming out of his hiding place to kill ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. He feared that Muslim ibn ‘Aqil was delaying and losing time. In order to give him a sign that the time was right for killing Ibn Ziyad, Sharik kept removing his head turban and placing it on the ground.

In order to induce Muslim to come out of his hiding place and kill ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, he would repeatedly recite poetry. He kept reciting poetry while his eyes were locked on Muslim's hiding place. Finally, with a voice loud enough for Muslim to hear, he said, "Quench his thirst, even though that will lead to my death."

At that moment, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad turned his face towards Hani ibn ‘Urwah Madhhaji and said, "Your cousin hallucinates because of his illness." Hani answered, "Since he got ill, Sharik has been speaking deliriously. He does not understand what he utters."

‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad left the gathering. Muslim ibn ‘Aqil did not make the least attempt to kill him. The question that can be asked here is: Why did Muslim ibn ‘Aqil not act according to their discussion and kill the matrix of corruption and the zenith of perversion, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, before the event of Karbala? In other words, why did he not exact vengeance and retribution before the crime?

Response

Various responses have been offered for the above question and objection, and we will now mention some of them:

1. Muslim ibn ‘Aqil could not resort to deceit and trickery in order to kill ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad because the Holy Prophet (S) forbade any kind of guile. Therefore, Muslim could not employ craftiness in order to fight ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. Imam al-Sadiq (as) recounts a *hadith* in which Allah's Prophet (S) said,

«إنّ الاسلام قيد الفتك.»

"Verily, Islam became an obstruction of deceit and an obstacle of trickery. (Islam has tied and chained guile and craftiness)."[1]

2. It has been narrated in history books that the wife of Hani ibn ‘Urwah had made Muslim ibn ‘Aqil

swear not to kill ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad in her house. She even cried in front of Muslim ibn ‘Aqil in order to persuade him not to carry out their plan. This is something which Muslim ibn ‘Aqil himself mentioned.

3. Killing ‘Ubayd Allah by means of deceit was not compatible with Muslim’s conduct and personality because he was a man endowed with strong faith and abstinence. He was raised and brought up in the house of Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (as).

The responsibilities he was carrying from Imam al-Husayn (as) were to get and secure the people’s allegiance for the Holy Imam (as) and inform him about all that was taking place in Kufah, not killing ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. Therefore, if he had killed ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, he would have gone beyond the domain of his duties and beyond his line of responsibilities.

4. Muslim ibn ‘Aqil considered his duty to be the awakening of the consciousness of the people. If ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad and the likes of him were assassinated in the absence of social consciousness arising from awareness among the people, the result would be that the people would bring to power someone similar or even worse than Ibn Ziyad.

The people had to become aware and informed about the corruption and perversion of the caliph himself. This social awareness and awakening could not be attained by assassinating one man. This is why there is no historical document confirming that Muslim ibn ‘Aqil had concurred with Sharik’s plan of assassinating ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. It is possible that Muslim ibn ‘Aqil was thinking about this plan, but did not have a definite intention of executing it.

5. When we deeply reflect upon this event, we come to the conclusion that Hani ibn ‘Urwah had granted guarantees of safety to ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. The reason is that when Ibn Ziyad asked Hani to give him permission to come and visit Sharik, Hani ibn ‘Urwah granted him the permission.

This in itself is a kind of verbal guarantee which Hani gave to ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. In these circumstances, Islam binds a man to respect the rules of civility by stipulating that he should not kill anyone who has been granted guarantees of safety, even if that person is a matrix of corruption and a source of perversion like Ibn Ziyad especially when this person is visiting another person’s house, not yours, and the host’s wife is not pleased with such an action and is pleading with you to quit the plan; particularly when she insists that if you seriously intend to carry out the assassination, you should do it elsewhere, and not in her house.

6. ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad had come with bodyguards. Some of his bodyguards had remained outside the house behind the door and some had come inside the house along with him. The atmosphere prevailing in Kufah at that time demanded that everyone take every precaution about their lives. There was no guarantee that Muslim ibn ‘Aqil would have succeeded at killing ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad even if he had carried out his plan.

7. There was also no guarantee that had Muslim ibn ‘Aqil succeeded at killing ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad,

the people of Kufah would have judged in his favor and put him in the governor's palace.

The people of Kufah feared that if 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad got killed in Kufah, the central government in Sham would just send a more bloodthirsty man, worse than 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, to Kufah to kill them indiscriminately. They were afraid that the central government in Sham would hold them responsible for killing the governor, and as a result avenge his death with massacre of the people of Kufah.

1. Tahdhib al-Ahkam, vol. 10, p. 214; Al-Kafi, vol. 7, p. 375.

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