

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 9

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

When the head of al Husayn, peace be on him, arrived and after Ibn Sad arrived on the next day (bringing) with him the daughters and household of al-Husayn, peace be on him, Ibn Ziyad sat before the people in the governor's palace. He had given the people a general summons and had ordered them to be present (to see) the head. He put it in front of him, and he began to look at it with a smile. In his hand he had a cane and he began to poke at the teeth with it.

When Zayd b. Arqam, a Companion of the Prophet who was (then) an old man, saw him poking at the teeth with the cane, he said

Take your cane away from those two lips. For, by God, other than Whom there is no deity, I have seen the lips of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, touch those two lips countless times.

(With that) he began to weep.

"Does God make your eyes weep?" asked Ibn Ziyad. "Or are you weeping because of God's victory? If it was not for the fact that you are an old man who has become silly and your mind has left you, I would cut off your head."

Zayd b. Arqam stood up in front of him and went to his house.

(Meanwhile) the family of al-Husayn, peace be on him, was brought before Ibn Ziyad. Zaynab, the sister of al-Husayn, peace be on him, came in in the middle of the group, pretending not to be herself; she was wearing her dirtiest clothes. She went and sat in a corner of the palace and her maids crowded around her.

"Who is that woman who has gone to the side and has sat in a corner with her women?" Ibn Ziyad demanded but Zaynab did not answer. He repeated the question about her a second time.

This is Zaynab, daughter of Fatimah, the daughter of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, one of her women told him.

"Praise be to God Who has disgraced you, killed you and revealed the false nature of your claims," said Ibn Ziyad as he came towards her.

Praise be to God Who has favoured us with His Prophet, Muhammad, may God bless him and his family, answered Zaynab, and He has purified us completely from sin. He only disgraces the great sinner and reveals the false nature of the profligate. Such men are not among us, praise be to God.

"How do you consider God has treated your House?" asked Ibn Ziyad,

God decreed death for them and they went forward (bravely) to their resting-places, Zaynab replied, God will gather you and us together. You will plead your excuses to Him and we will be your adversaries before Him.

Ibn Ziyad became enraged and burnt with anger.

"Governor," intervened 'Amr b. Hurayth, "She is only a woman and women are not responsible for anything that they say. Do not blame her mistakes."

"God has healed my soul from your tyranny and the rebellion of your House," he said to her.

Zaynab, peace be on her, became weak and wept.

By my life, she cried out to him, You have killed the mature ones (of my family); you have pierced my family; have cut down my young branches; and you have pulled out my root. If this heals you, then you have been healed.

"By my life," declared Ibn Ziyad, "this is a woman who makes poetry. Your father was a poet."

What has a woman to do with poetry?, she answered. Indeed I have (things) to distract me from poetry but my heart causes me say what I am saying.

'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them, was presented to him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am 'Ali b. al-Husayn" he answered.

"Didn't God kill 'Ali b. al-Husayn?"

"I have a brother who is also called 'Ali," answered "Ali, peace be on him, "the people killed him."

"Rather God killed him," affirmed Ibn Ziyad.

"God receives the souls at the time of their death (XXXIX: 42)."

"How dare you answer me like that!" shouted Ibn Ziyad angrily, "and that will be the last of you because of (your) answer to me. Take him away and cut his head off!"

Zaynab, his aunt, clung on to him, pleading: "O Ibn Ziyad, haven't you had enough of our blood?"

Then she clung on to him and said: "By God, I will not leave him. If you kill him, kill me with him."

Ibn Ziyad looked at her and at him, and said, "How wonderful is family relationship! I think she wants me to kill her with him. Leave him, for I see him (now) for what he is."

He rose from his assembly to leave the palace and go to the mosque. He went up on the pulpit. He praised and glorified God, then he said:

Praise be to God Who has revealed the truth and the followers of the truth, and has given victory to the Commander of the faithful, Yazid, and his party, and has killed the liar who is the son of a liar and his Shi'a.

At this 'Abd Allah b. Afif al-Azdi, who had been one of the Shiaa of the Commander of the faithful ('Ali b. Abi Talib) stood in front of him and shouted:

O enemy of God, you are the liar and your father and (the man) who appointed you and his father. O Ibn Murjana, you kill the sons of Prophets and take the place of men of truth on the pulpit.

"Get him for me," ordered Ibn Ziyad.

The soldiers seized him but he gave the battle cry of al-Azd. Seven hundred of them (quickly) gathered and took him away from the soldiers.

At night Ibn Ziyad sent someone to get him out of his house. He was executed and crucified in al-Sabkha, may God have mercy on him.

The (next) morning Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad sent the head of al-Husayn, peace be on him, (to Yazid) after it had been taken through all the streets and tribes of Kufa.

(It is reported from Zayd b. Arqam:)

It was brought past; it was stuck on a spear and I was in a room in my (house). As it was opposite me I heard it recite: **"Or do you think that the Companions of the Cave and the inscription were among Our wonderful signs. (XVIII, 9)."**

My flesh shuddered and I called out,

O son of the Apostle of God, your head is miraculous, miraculous.

(This account is not in Tabari)

When they had finished taking it around Kufa and had brought it back to the palace door, Ibn Ziyad gave it to Zahar b. Qays and he (also) gave him the heads of his companions. He despatched him to Yazid b. Muawiya and he sent with him Abu Burda b. 'Awf al-Azdi, and Tariq b. Abi Zubyan al-Azdi together with a group of Kufans, to take them to Yazid b. Mu'awiya in Damascus.

(Abd Allah b. Rabiaa al-Himyari reported:)

I was with Yazid b. Mu'awiya in Damascus when Zahar b. Qays brought the head to him.

"Woe upon you! What is behind you? What have you got?" demanded Yazid.

Commander of the faithful, he replied, I bring good news of God's victory and support. Al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, came against us with eighteen men of his House and sixty of his Shi'a. We went out to meet them and we asked them to surrender and submit to the authority of the governor, 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, or to fight. They chose to fight rather than to surrender.

We attacked them as the sun rose and surrounded them on every side. Eventually (our) swords took their toll of the heads of the people and they began to flee without having any refuge (to go to). They (tried to) take refuge from us on the (open) hills and in the hollows, like the doves seek refuge from a hawk.

By God, Commander of the faithful, it was nothing but the slaughtering of animals for slaughter. (It was only the time taken by) the sleep of a man taking his siesta (before) we had come upon the last of them. There were their naked bodies, their blood-stained clothes, their faces thrown in the dust.

The sun burst down on them; the wind scattered (dust) over them; their visitors were (scavenging) eagles and vultures.

Yazid looked down for a time, then he raised his head and said:

I would have been satisfied with your obedience (to my orders) without this killing of al-Husayn, peace be on him. If it had been me who had accompanied him, I would have let him off (such a fate).

After Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had despatched the head of al-Husayn, he ordered the women and the young boys to be made ready for travelling. He ordered 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them, to be chained with a chain around his neck. Then he despatched them, to follow the heads, with Muhaffir b. Thalaba al Aidhi and Shamir b. Dhi al-Jawshan. They set out with them until they caught up with the people with the head. 'Ali b. al-Husayn did not speak a word to any of the people who had the head on

that journey. Eventually they reached (their destination). When they reached the door of Yazid's (palace), Muhaffir b. Tha'laba raised his voice and shouted: "Here is Muhaffir b. Thalaba who has brought the Commander of the faithful these vile profligates."

'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on him, answered him:

What did the mother of Muhaffir give birth to more evil and more grievous (than him)?

When the heads were put in front of Yazid and among them was the head of al-Husayn, peace be on him, Yazid recited:

We will split the skull of proud men (who come) against us; they were very disobedient and oppressive.

Yahya b. al-Hakam, the brother of Marwan b. al-Hakam recited:

On the bank (of the river) a great army met him who is closer in kinship (to Yazid) than Ibn Ziyad (is), the man with a false lineage.

The offspring of Sumayya has acquired status, while the offspring of the daughter of the Apostle of God is (given) none.

Yazid struck his hand against the chest of Yahya b. al-Hakam and shouted, "Be quiet!"

Then he said to 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them

Son of al Husayn, your father cut (the bond of) kinship with me and showed ignorance of my rights, trying to deprive me of my position of authority. (Now) God has treated him in the way you have seen.

No misfortune strikes the earth nor yourselves unless it has been written in a book before we bring it into existence; that is easy for God (Quran 57: 22)

replied "Ali b. al-Husayn.

"Answer him," Yazid urged his son, Khalid. However Khalid did not know what to say in reply. So Yazid answered:

Say rather: Whatever misfortune has struck you is because of what your hands have earned. And (God) forgives much (Qur'an 42: 30)

He summoned the women and the children and they were made to sit in front of him. What he saw was dreadful.

"May God detest Ibn Murjana," he said: "If there had been (any bond of) kinship between him and you, he would not have done this to you; he would not have sent you in this state."

(Fatimah, daughter of al-Husayn, peace be on him, reported:)

When we sat before Yazid, he showed pity on us. An Ahmar of the Syrians stood up and said to Yazid: "Commander of the faithful, give me this one."

He meant me. (Then) I was a pretty young girl. I shuddered for I thought that that would be allowed to them. I caught hold of the skirt of my aunt Zaynab and she told (me) that that would not happen. She said to the Syrian:

By God, you are a liar. By God, you are (too) lowly born! Such a thing is not for you nor for him (to decide).

"You are a liar," Yazid cried out angrily. "That is for me (to decide). If I wish to do anything, I can do it."

No, by God, she replied, God would only let you do that if you left our faith and professed belief in another (religion).

"It is me," screamed Yazid, distraught with anger, "whom you are treating in this (way). It is your father who has left the religion, and your brother

I am led by the religion of God, the religion of my father and the religion of my brother, she answered, and (it is what) you are led by, and your grandfather and your father, if you are a Muslim.

"Enemy of God, you lie," he shouted.

You are a Commander of the faithful, (yet) you vilify unjustly and you have become oppressive with your authority, she answered.

(At this) he was ashamed and became silent. "Give me that girl," repeated the Syrian. "Be a bachelor," Yazid said to him, "May God strike you dead!"

Then he ordered the women to be lodged in a house on (the) banks (of the river). With them (also he sent) their brother, "Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them. (Later) a house was set aside for them, which was attached to Yazid's own house. They resided (there) for several days, (After a short time) he summoned al-Nu'man b. Bashir and told him to make preparations to take these women back to Medina. When he was about to despatch them, he summoned 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them. He took him aside.

"God curse Ibn Murjana," he said. "If I had been with your father, he would never have asked me for a favour without me granting him it; I would have protected him from death with all my power. But God has decreed what you have seen. Write to me from Medina and everything that you need will be yours."

He presented clothes to him and to his family. He sent with them in the group (of men under the

command) of Numan b. Bashir, a messenger, who brought him (al-Numan) the order to set out with them in the night; and that they should go in front of him but they should never be out of his sight. When they stopped, he should go aside from them and he and his followers should separate around them like a group of guards over them. He should (only) keep away from them when any person of their group wanted to wash or perform a need, so he (or she) would not be ashamed.

(The messenger) set off with them amid the group of al-Numan. (Al-Nu'man) continued to stay close to them along the road but he was kind to them as Yazid had instructed him and he looked after them until they entered Medina.

After Ibn Ziyad had despatched the head of al-Husayn, peace be on him, to Yazid, he went to Abd al-Malik b Abi al-Harith al-Sulami and told him,

Go to 'Amr b. Sad b. al-As in Medina and give him the good news of the killing of al-Husayn (peace be on him).

(Abd al-Malik reported:)

I rode my mount and went towards Medina. (On the way) one of Quraysh met me.

"What is the news?" he asked.

"The news is for the governor, (then) you will hear it," I answered.

"We belong to God and to Him we will return," he said. "By God, al-Husayn, peace be on him, has been killed."

When I went to Amr b. Said, he asked: "What is your purpose?"

"What will please the governor," I answered, "Al-Husayn, peace be on him, has been killed."

"Go out and announce his being killed," he told me.

I announced (it). I have never heard such wailing as the wailing of the Banu Hashim in their houses for al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on him, when they heard the announcement of his death. I went back (in) to 'Amr b. Said. When he saw me, he smiled at me and laughed. Then he quoted a verse of Amr b.

Madikarib:

Then women of Banu Ziyad raised a great lament like the lamentation of our women mourning (after the battle) of al-Arnab.

"This lamentation is in return for the lamentation for Uthman,"

'Amr exclaimed. Then he went up on the pulpit and informed the people about the killing of al-Husayn b.

‘Ali, and he summoned (them to obey) Yazid b. Muawiya. (After that) he went down.

One of the retainers (mawali) of Abd Allah b. Jafar b. Abi Talib, peace be on him, went to him and announced the news of the killing of his two sons and he said that we (all return) to God.

"This is what we have through al-Husayn b. ‘Ali, peace be on them," said Abu Salasil, the retainer (mawl^o) of Abd Allah.

O son of an obscene (woman)," exclaimed Abd Allah b. Jafar, taking off his shoe (to strike him). "Are you saying this of al- ,Husayn, peace be on him? If I had been present with him, I would have preferred not to leave him and to be killed with him. By God, I would not have withheld those two from him and I take consolation from what befell them in that these two were struck down with my brother and cousin, consoling him and enduring with him.

He went forward to those who were sitting with him and said:

Praise be to God, Who has (made life hard for me) through the death of al-Husayn. For I did not console al-Husayn with my own hands, my two sons consoled him.

Umm Luqman, the daughter of Aqil b. Abi Talib, may God have mercy on them, came out crying when she heard the news of the death of al-Husayn, peace be on him. With her were her sisters Umm Hani', Ramla and Zaynab, daughters of Aqil b. Abi Talib, may God have mercy on them. She wept for her (relatives) slain on the bank and she recited:

What would you say if the Prophet asked you: What have you, the last of the (religious) communities, done With my offspring and my family after my departure from them? They are prisoners and slain and have been stained with their own blood.

What sort of reward is this for my advice to you, that you should oppose me by doing evil to my blood relations?

On the night of the day upon which Amr b. Said had given the public notice of the killing of al Husayn b. ‘Ali, peace be upon them, in Mecona, in the middle of the night the Medians heard a voice calling out. They listened to the voice but they did not see any person.

The voice called out:

O men who ignorantly killed al Husayn; hear the news of punishment and chastisement

All the people of heaven, prophets, angels and slain, prosecute you.

You have been cursed by the tongue of the son of David, and (that) of Moses and (that) of the master of the Gospels.

End of Part 9

End of this Series

References:

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