

Chapter 5: Martyrdom of Muslim bin Aqil

The situation in Kufa became so dangerous that even good and distinguished supporters like Sulayman bin Surd, Musayyab bin Najba and Rafa bin Shaddad were not seen anywhere and the person, who was the chief of twelve thousand men a day earlier, was wandering in the streets of Kufa in a state of distress and perplexity and could not find his way.

Tabari's account of this event which is almost identical with that quoted by Shaykh Mufid in "al-Irshad" is as follows: "Muslim bin Aqil came out of the gate of the Masjid and suddenly found himself alone. There could be seen not even one person, who might show him the way or guide him to a place or defend him if he faced an enemy. He, therefore wandered in the streets of Kufa without knowing where to go".

There is a point that it will not be inappropriate to mention here. It has been for centuries now that the people have reproached the Kufians for their perfidies and breach of promise. Just as they have praised and greeted the faithful companions and friends of the Imam, they have cursed these persons who promised support to him on one day but drew their swords against him on the other day and continued their opposition till he was martyred.

To be fair, however, it may be said that the people of Kufa did not do anything that might be unusual or surprising and on both the occasions they acted according to rule i.e. when they wrote the letters to the Imam and also when they drew their swords against him.

So long as they were leading peaceful lives and the swords had not been unsheathed and a lenient man namely Nuam[ؓ] bin Bashir was the ruler of Kufa they could distinguish between truth and falsehood by means of the light which Almighty Allah has bestowed upon man to enable him to differentiate between right and wrong, and between truth and falsehood, and correctly assessed as to who was fit for the Imamate and leadership of the people.

They did not consider any other Muslim of that time to be equal to him. This correct discernment of truth and falsehood by them was as usual and according to rule, because so long as a person has not deviated from the path of nature and sound mind by means of factors of deviation, and fear, hope, avarice, profit or loss have not confused and misled him, he knows which is the right path and which is

the wrong one and makes no mistake in distinguishing between them.

Allah says: Have We not given him two eyes, a tongue and two lips. Have We not shown him the ways of good and evil? (Surah al-Balad, 90: 8 -10)

However, when these very persons, who could distinguish between truth and falsehood were put to test, the question of fear and avarice and profit and loss arose; hence the paths of religion and expediency got separated from each other. They acted as most of the people usually do i.e. they kept aloof from truth and the truthful, and began to talk about prudence, wisdom, precaution and foresight instead of jihad, sacrifice, resistance, reform and valor.

Truly speaking it is not strange that the Kufians did not sacrifice their lives to carry out their responsibility. Those who wonder at their conduct should in the first instance imagine themselves to be placed in the same situation and then decide fairly whether in these conditions and circumstances, would they have acted in a different way?

In fact one should wonder at those persons, who remained steadfast in all circumstances, and in spite of all hardships, supported truth and laid down their lives for it. So much so that even when their bodies were torn to pieces and they fell down on the ground, they were worried whether they had performed their duty of self-sacrifice and combating against injustice and oppression properly, and consequently would feel ashamed before Allah and His Prophet on the Day of Judgment!

Qarza bin Ka'b Khazraji was one of the companions of the Holy Prophet. He participated in the Battle of Uhud and later battles. During the Caliphate of Umar he came to Kufa and imparted instruction in jurisprudence to the people. His son Amr bin Qarzi Ansari was one of the devoted companions of Imam Husayn. As stated by Ibn Tawus in Luhuf so long as Amr did not collapse on the day of Ashura owing to excessive wounds, the Holy Imam did not sustain any injury.

Amr received the arrows on his hands and the blows of the swords on his body, and when eventually he fell on the ground and rolled in dust he looked at the Holy Imam's face and said: "O son of the Prophet of Allah! Have I acquitted myself of my duty? Then Imam said in reply: "Yes, you have, and you will enter Paradise I earlier than me. Convey my greetings to the Holy Prophet and tell him that his Husayn is also arriving soon".

The steadfastness and constancy of these noble souls is really astonishing. One must wonder at their resolution and firmness and praise and greet them, because the different aspects of life and severe pain did not change their attitude and did not make them deviate from their Divine course. Many persons who have read or heard Zahhiik bin Abdullah Mashriqi Hamdiini have regretted his weakness, bad luck, and lack of foresight and wondered that while his Imam was surrounded by the enemies this man took leave of the Imam and went away.

However, very few have judged fairly and realized that in the particular circumstances it might not have

been possible to show even that firmness and steadfastness which was shown by him. One should wonder at his staying with the Imam and participating in the battle rather than upon his eventual departure.

Tabari quotes the story from Zahhik himself in these words: "Malik bin Nazr Arji and I went to see Imam Husyan and sat down before him after paying due respect to him. He welcomed us and said: "For what purpose have you come to see me?" We said: "We have come to greet you and to seek your blessings, so that we may renew our pledge, and also inform you that the people of Kufa are ready to fight against you. The Imam said: "Allah is sufficient for me and He is the best Helper".

When we bade farewell to him Imam Husayn said: "Is there anything against your rendering me assistance? My companion Malik bin Nazr said: "I am indebted and have also to support my wife and children". I said: "I, too, am faced with the same problems. Notwithstanding this, however, if you give me an option that I may go away in case you become alone and my support is no longer of any use to you, I am prepared to stay on and assist you till that time". The Imam accepted my services on this condition and I stayed on with him.

When on the day of Ashura all his supporters were martyred and the enemy reached up to the Imam and the men belonging to his family, and none remained with him except two persons namely Sawayd bin Amr bin Abi Muta Khasami and Bashir bin Amr Hazrami I said to him: "O son of the Prophet of Allah! As you are aware, we had agreed that so long as you have supporters I shall also remain with you and assist you and when they are killed I shall be free to go away. The Imam said: "You are right, but how can you escape this army? If you can find a way out I have no objection to your going away".

Zahhik adds: "When the soldiers of Amr bin Sā'd were pursuing our horses I had tied my horse in one of the tents and was fighting on foot, so that I succeeded in killing two enemies of the Imam and amputated the hand of another. On that day the Imam praised my performance repeatedly and said: "When he permitted me to leave I brought out my horse, mounted it, and struck it till it stood up on its hind hooves. Then I let it go. The enemies were, therefore, forced to let me pass and I came out of their rows. Eleven persons pursued me and were about to capture me, but Kathir bin Abdullah Shabi, Ayyub bin Musrah Khaivani and Qays bin Abdullah Saidi identified me and I was saved on account of their intercession".

It is true that one must feel sorry for this man, because he missed such a blessing, left such an Imam alone, and lost such an opportunity in vain, although he could also become one like Habib ibn Mazahir Asadi and Burayr bin Khuzayr Hamdani. However, his case is quite different from that of the people of Kufa. This man had not written any letter to the Imam and had not promised any sacrifice.

He had also not taken an oath of allegiance to Muslim bin Aqil. And when he reached the Imam he did what he had undertaken to do, and did not boast that he would go to any length in making sacrifices. On the other hand he himself stated to what extent he was prepared to go.

However, the people, who took the oath of allegiance to Muslim bin Aqil left him alone during the night of 9th of Zilhaj in the streets of Kufa, and if a woman had not admitted him into her house and quenched his thirst, there was no one who might have rendered him even that much service. Muslim spent the last night of his life in that woman's house and when on the following day Ibn Ziyad took steps to arrest him and his men besieged the house, he was obliged to come out of the house to meet martyrdom.

When Muslim was taken prisoner he made a request to Muhammad bin Asha'th that he might send someone to inform Imam Husayn about his (Muslim's) martyrdom and also to convey the following message to him: "May my parents be your ransom! Return from this journey along with the members of your family lest the Kufians should deceive you.

They are the companions of your father, who wished to get rid of them by means of death or martyrdom. The people of Kufa lied to you as well as to me, and nothing can be achieved by means of falsehood". In the court of Ibn Ziyad also he made two requests to Umar bin Sa'ad; firstly that he should sell his coat of mail and sword and repay his debt amounting to seven hundred dirhams; secondly that he should obtain his dead body from Ibn Ziyad and bury it".

Muslim and Hani were martyred on the same day and their heads were cut off and sent to Yazid in Damascus.

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