

The Journey of Imam Husayn

The Journey of Imam Husayn (as), Excerpts from the book *Kitab al Irshad*

Authors(s):

Shaykh al-Mufid [3]

Translator(s):

Dr. I. K. A. Howard [4]

The Journey of Imam Husayn (as)

Sheikh Al Mufid

Excerpts from the book *Kitab al Irshad*

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Translated by I.K.A Howard

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Imam Husayn (as) sets out on his Journey

Al Husayn, the blessings of God be on him, set out from Mecca to Iraq on the day of Muslim's (attempted) rising in Kufa, that is the day of Tarwiya, after staying in Mecca for the rest of Shaban, the month of Ramadhan, Shawwal and Dhu al Qada and eight days of Dhu- al-Hijja in the year 60 A.H. (680). During his stay in Mecca, peace be on him, a number of Hijazis and Basrans had gathered around him, joining themselves to his household and his retainers (mawali).

When he determined on journeying to Iraq, he made the circumbulation of the (sacred) House and the ritual running between al-Safa and al-Marwa. Then he left the state of consecration (for the pilgrimage) (after) he had performed the lesser pilgrimage (umra) because he was not able to perform the greater pilgrimage (hajj). Through fear of being apprehended in Mecca, and being taken to Yazid b. Muiawiya,

he, peace be on him, had set out early with his House, his sons and those of his Shia who had joined him.

[As it has been reported to us:]

News of Muslim's (capture and death) had not yet reached him because (it had only happened) on the day he set out.

[It is reported that al-Farazdaq, the poet, said:]

I made the pilgrimage with my mother in the year 60 A.H. (680). I was driving her camel when I entered the sanctuary. (There) I met al-Husayn b. Ali, peace be on them, leaving Mecca accompanied by (some men carrying) swords and shields.

"Whose caravan is this?" I asked.

"Al-Husayn b. Ali's, peace be on them," was the reply. So I went up and greeted him.

"May God grant you your request and (fulfil) your hope in what you want, by my father and mother, son of the Apostle of God," I said to him. "But what is making you hurry away from the pilgrimage?"

"If I did not hurry away, I would be apprehended," he replied. Then he asked me: "Who are you?"

"An Arab," I answered and he did not question me (about myself) any further.

"Tell me about the people you have left behind you," he asked.

"You have asked a good (question)," I answered. "The hearts of the people are with you but their swords are against you. The decision comes from Heaven and God does what he wishes."

"You have spoken truly of the affair belonging to God," he replied.

"Every day He (is involved) in (every) matter" (55: 29) If fate sends down what we like and are pleased with, we praise God for His blessings. He is the One from Whom help should be sought in order to give thanks to Him. However, although fate may frustrate (our) hopes, yet He does not destroy (the souls of) those whose intention is the truth and whose hearts are pious."

"True, God brings you what you wish for (ultimately) and guards you against what you are threatened by," I said. Then I asked him about matters concerning vows and pilgrimage rites. He told me about them and then moved his mount off, saying farewell, and so we parted.

When al-Husayn b. Ali, peace be on them, left Mecca, Yahya b. Said b. al-'As met him with a group (of men). They had been sent to him by 'Amr b. Said.

"Come back from where you are going," they ordered. But he refused (to obey) them and continued. The

two groups came to blows and hit at each other with whips. However al-Husayn and his followers resisted fiercely. Al-Husayn continued until he got to al-Tanim. There he met a camel-train which had come from Yemen. He hired from its people (additional) camels for himself and his followers to ride.

Then he said to the owners (of the camels): "Whoever (of you) wants to come with us to Iraq, we will pay his hire and enjoy his company and whoever wants to leave some way along the road we will pay his hire for the distance he has travelled."

Some of the people went with him but others refused. Abd Allah b. Jafar sent his sons, Awn and Muhammad, after him, and he wrote a letter to him which he gave to them. In it, he said:

I ask you before God (to return) if you have set out when you see my letter. For I am very concerned because the direction in which you are heading will have within it your destruction, and the extirpation of your House. If you are destroyed today, the light of the land will be extinguished; for you are the (standard) of those who are rightly-guided and the hope of the believers.

Do not hurry on your journey as I am following this letter. Greetings.

Abd Allah, then went to 'Amr b. Said and asked him to write to al-Husayn (offering him) a guarantee of security, and (promising) to favour him, so that he would return from where he was going. Amr b. Said wrote a letter in which he offered him favour and a guarantee of security for himself. He dispatched it with his brother Yahya b. Said. Yahya b. Said went after him (as did) Abd Allah after dispatching his sons. The two handed ('Amr's) letter to him and strove (to persuade) him to return.

"I have seen the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, in my sleep," answered (al-Husayn), "and he ordered me (to do) what I am carrying out."

"What was that vision?" they both asked.

"I have not told anyone of it," he answered, "and I am not going to tell anyone until I meet my Lord, the Mighty and Exalted."

When 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far despaired of (persuading) him, he told his sons, Awn and Muhammad, to stay with him, to go with him and to struggle on behalf of him. He returned with Yahya b. Sa'id to Mecca.

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, pressed on swiftly and directly towards Iraq until he reached Dhat' Irq.

When Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had learnt of the journey of al-Husayn, peace be on him, from Mecca to Kufa, he had sent al-Husayn b. Numayr, the commander of the bodyguard (shurta), to station himself at al-Qadisiyya and to set up a (protective) link of cavalry between the area of al-Qadisiyya to Khaffan and the area of al-Qadisiyya to al-Qutqutaniyya. He informed the men that al-Husayn was heading for Iraq.

When al-Husayn, peace be on him, reached al-Hajiz (a hill above) Batn al-Rumma, he sent Qays b. Mushir al Saydawi – some say it was his brother-in-nurture, Abd Allah b. Yuqtur to Kufa. For he, peace be upon him, had not yet learnt the news of (the fate of) Ibn 'Aqil. He sent a letter with him:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate From al-Husayn b. Ali

To his brother believers and Muslims,

Greetings to you, I praise God before you, other than Whom there is no deity. Muslim b. Aqil's letter came to me, informing me of your sound judgement and the agreement of your leaders to support us, and to seek our rights. I have asked God to make your actions good and reward you with the greatest reward. I set out to you from Mecca on 8th of Dhu al-Hijja, the Day of Tarwiya. When my messenger reaches you, be urgent and purposeful in your affairs, for I am coming to you within the (next few) days.

Greeting and the mercy and blessings of God.

Muslim had written to al-Husayn seventeen days before he was killed and the Kufans had written to him: "Here you have a hundred thousand swords. Do not delay."

Qays b. Mushir went towards Kufa with the letter. However, when he reached al-Qadisiyya, al-Husayn b. Numayr apprehended him and sent him to Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad.

"Go up on the pulpit," Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad ordered him, "and curse the liar, al-Husayn b. Ali, peace be on him"

Qays went up on the pulpit and praised and glorified God. Then he said:

People, this man, al-Husayn b. 'Ali the best of God's creatures, the son of Fatima, the daughter of the Apostle, may God bless him and his family and grant them peace, (is nearby). I am his messenger to you. Answer him.

Then he cursed Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad and his father and prayed for forgiveness for Ali b. Abi Talib and blessed him. 'Ubayd Allah ordered him to be thrown from the top of the palace. They threw him and he was smashed to pieces.

[It is (also) reported:]

He fell on the ground in chains and his bones were crushed and there only remained to him his last breath. A man called 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umayr al-Lakhmi came to him and cut his throat. When he was told that that had been a shameful (thing to do) and he was blamed for it, he said: "I wanted to relieve him (of his suffering)."

The Continuation of the Journey

(While this had been going on) al-Husayn, peace be on him, had left Hajiz in the direction of Kufa until he came to one of the watering (places) of the Arabs. There there was 'Abd Allah b. Muti al-'Adawli, who was staying there. When he saw al-Husayn, peace be on him, he got up and said to him: "(May I ransom) my father and mother for you, son of the Apostle of God, what has brought you (here)?" He brought him (forward) and helped him to dismount.

"It is a result of the death of Muawiya as you would know," replied al Husayn, peace be on him. "The Iraqis have written to me urging me to (come to) them"

"I remind you, son of the Apostle of God, (of God) and the sacredness of Islam, lest it be violated. I adjure you before God (to think) about the sacredness of Quraysh. I adjure you before God (to think) about the sacredness of the Arabs. By God, if you seek that which is in the hands of Banu Umayya, they will kill you. If they kill you, they will never fear anyone after you. Then it will be the sacredness of Islam which is violated, and the sacredness of Quraysh and the sacredness of the Arabs. Don't do it! Don't go to Kufa! Don't expose yourself to Banu Umayya!"

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, insisted on continuing his journey. (In the meantime) 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had ordered (the area) which was between Waqisa and the roads to Syria and Basra to be occupied (so that) they should not let anyone enter, nor anyone leave (Kufa).

However, al-Husayn, peace be on him, went on without knowing anything (of that) until he met some Arabs. He asked them (about the situation) and they told him: "No, by God, we don't know (anything about it) except that we cannot get into or out of (Kufa)."

He continued on his journey.

[A group of Fazara and Bajila reported (the following account). They said:]

We were with Zuhayr b. al-Qayn al-Bajah when we came from Mecca. (Although) we were travelling alongside al Husayn, peace be on him, there was nothing more hateful to us than that we should stop with him at a halting place. (Yet) when al-Husayn, peace be on him, travelled and halted, we could not avoid halting with him. Al-Husayn halted at the side (of the road) and we halted at the (other) side (of the road). While we were sitting, eating our food, a messenger of al- Husayn, peace be on him, approached, greeted us and entered (our camp).

"Zuhayr b. al-Qayn," he said, "Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn, peace be on him, has sent me to you (to ask) you to come to him."

Each man of us threw away what was in his hands (i.e. threw up his hands in horror); it was (as surprising) as if birds had alighted on our heads.

"Glory be to God," (Zuhayr's) wife said to him, "did the son of the Messenger of God send for you? Then aren't you going to him? If you went to him, you would hear what he had to say. Then you could leave him (if you wanted to)."

Zuhayr b. al-Qayn went (across) to him. It was not long before he returned to announce that he was heading east. He ordered his tent (to be struck) and (called for) his luggage, mounts and equipment. His tent was pulled down and taken to al-Husayn, peace be on him, then he said to his wife: "You are divorced, go back to your family, for I do not want anything to befall you except good."

Then he said to his companions:

Whoever wants to follow me (may do so), otherwise he is at the end of his covenant with me (i.e. released from obedience to follow Zuhayr as the leader of his tribal group). I will tell you a story (of something which happened to me once): we were raiding a rich land. God granted us victory and we won (a lot of) booty. Salman al-Farisi, the mercy of God be on him, said to us: 'Are you happy with the victory which God has granted you and the booty you have won?'

We said: 'Yes.' Then he said: 'Therefore when you meet the lord of the young men of the family of Muhammad be happier to fight with them than you are with the booty which you have obtained today.' As for me. I pray that God may be with you."

He remained among the people with al-Husayn until he was killed.

[Abd Allah b. Sulayman and al-Mundhir b. Mushaimil both from Asad, reported:]

When we had finished the pilgrimage, there was no concern more important to us than to join al-Husayn, peace be on him, on the road, so that we might see what happened in his affair. We went along trotting our two camels speedily until we joined him at Zarud.

As we approached, there we (saw) a man from Kufa who had changed his route when he had seen al-Husayn, peace be on him. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, had stopped as if he wanted (to speak to) him, but (the man) ignored him and went on. We went on towards the man. One of us said to the other: "Come with us to ask this man if he has news of Kufa."

We came up to him and greeted him. He returned out greeting. "From which (tribe) do you come, fellow?" we asked.

"(I am) an Asadi," he answered.

"We also are Asadis," we said. "Who are you?"

"I am Bakr b. so and so," he answered and we told him our lineage. "Tell us of the people (you have left) behind you?" we asked.

"Yes," he replied, "I only left Kufa after Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani' b. 'Urwa had been killed. I saw them being dragged by their legs into the market-place."

We went on to join al-Husayn, peace be on him, and we were travelling close to him until he stopped at al-Thalabiyya in the evening. We caught up with him when he stopped and we greeted him. He returned our greeting.

"May God have mercy on you," we said, "we have news. If you wish, we will tell it to you publicly or if you wish, secretly." He looked at us and at his followers.

"There is no veil for these men," he answered.

"Did you see the rider whom you were near, yesterday evening?" "Yes," he answered, "I had wanted to question him."

"We have got the news from him and spared you (the trouble of) questioning him," we said. "He was a man from our (tribe), of sound judgment, honesty and intelligence. He told us that he had only left Kufa after Muslim and Hani' had been killed, and he had seen them being dragged by their legs into the market-place."

"We belong to God and to Him we shall return; may God have mercy on them both," said al-Husayn, and he repeated that several times.

"We adjure you before God," we exhorted him, "for your own life and for your House that you do not go from this place, for you have no one to support you in Kufa and no Shia. Indeed we fear that such men (will be the very ones who) will be against you."

"What is your opinion," he asked, looking towards the sons of 'Aqil, "now that Muslim has been killed?"

"By God," they declared, "we will not go back until we have taken our vengeance or have tasted (the death) which he tasted."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, came near us and said: "There is nothing good (left) in life for these men."

Then we knew that his decision had been taken to continue the journey. "May God be good to you," we said.

"May God have mercy on you both," he answered.

Then his followers said to him: "By God, you are not the same as Muslim b. Aqil. If you go to Kufa, the people will rush to (support) you."

He was silent and waited until daybreak. Then he ordered his boys and servants to get a lot of water, to give (the people) to drink and more for the journey. They set out (once more) and went on to Zubala.

News of 'Abd Allah b. Yuqtur reached him. He took out a written statement to the people and read it to them:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, News of the dreadful murder of Muslim b. Aqil Hani' b. Urwa, and Abd Allah b. Yuqtur has reached us. Our Shia have deserted us. Those of you who would prefer to leave us, may leave freely without guilt.

The people began to disperse from him to right and left until there were only left with him those followers who had come with him from Medina, and a small group of those who had joined him. Al-Husayn had done that because he realised that the Arabs who had followed him had only followed him because they thought that he was going to a land where the inhabitants' obedience to him had already been established. And he did not want them to accompany him without being (fully) aware of what they were going to.

At dawn, he ordered his followers to provide themselves with water and with extra (supplies of it). Then they set out until they passed Batn al Aqaba. He stopped there and was met by a shaykh of the Banu Ikrima called Amr b. Lawdhan.

"Where are you heading." he asked. "Kufa," replied al-Husayn, peace be on him.

"I implore you before God," exhorted the shaykh, "why are you going there? You won't come to anything there except the points of spears and the edges of swords. If those who sent for you were enough to support you in battle and had prepared the ground for you, and you came to them, that would be a wise decision. However, in the light of the situation as it has been described I don't think that you ought to do it."

"Servant of God," he answered, "wise decisions are not hidden from me. Yet the commands of God, the Exalted, cannot be resisted. By God, (my enemies) will not leave me till they have torn the very heart from the depths of my guts. If they do that, God will cause them to be dominated and humiliated until they become the most humiliated of the factions among nations.

Part 3

He, peace be on him, went on from Batn al Aqaba until he stopped at Sharaf (for the night). At dawn he ordered his boys to get water and more (for the journey). Then he continued from there until midday. While he was journeying, one of his followers exclaimed:

"God is greater (Allahu akbar)!"

"God is greater (Allahu akbar)!" responded al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then he asked: "Why did you say Allahu akbar?"

"I saw palm-trees," answered the man.

"This is a place in which we never see a palm-tree," a group of his followers asserted.

"What do you think it is then?" asked al-Husayn, peace be on him. "We think it is the ears of horses," they answered.

"By God, I think so too," he declared. Then he said: "(So that) we can face them in one direction (i.e. so that we are not surrounded), we should put at our rear whatever place of refuge (we can find)."

"Yes," said to him, "there is Dhu Husam over on your left. If you reach it before them, it will be (in) just (the position) you want." So he veered left towards it and we went in that direction with him. Even before we had had time to change direction the vanguard of the cavalry appeared in front of us and we could see them clearly. We left the road and when they saw that we had moved off the road, they (also) moved off the road towards us.

Their spears looked like palm branches stripped of their leaves and their standards were like birds' wings. Al-Husayn ordered his tents (to be put up) and they were erected. The people came up; (there were) about one thousand horsemen under the command of al-Hurr b. Yazid al-Tamimi. (It was) during the heat of midday (that) he and his cavalry stood (thus) facing al-Husayn, peace be on him. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, and his followers were all wearing their turbans and their swords (ready to fight).

"Provide (our) people with water and let them quench their thirst and give their horses water to drink little by little," al-Husayn ordered his boys. They did that and they began filling their bowls and cups and took them to the horses. When a horse had drunk three or four or five draughts, the water was taken away and given to another horse—until they had all been watered.

[Ali b. al-Taan al-Muharibi reported:]

I was with al-Hurr on that day, I was among the last of his followers to arrive. When al-Husayn, peace be on him, saw how thirsty both I and my horse were, he said: "Make your beast (rawiya) kneel." I thought rawiya meant water-skin so he said: "Cousin, make your camel (jamal) kneel." I did so. Then he said: "Drink." I did so, but when I drank, water flowed from my water-skin.

"Bend your water-skin," said al-Husayn. I did not know how to do that. He came up (to me) and bent it (into the proper position for drinking). Then I drank and gave my horse to drink.

Al-Hurr b. Yazid had come from al-Qadisiyya. Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had sent al-Husayn b. Numayr and ordered him to take up (his) position at al-Qadisiyya. Then al-Hurr had been sent in advance with one thousand horsemen to meet al-Husayn.

Al-Hurr remained positioned opposite to al-Husayn, peace be on him, until the time for the midday prayer drew near. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, ordered al-Hajjaj b. Masruq to give the call to prayer.

When the second call to prayer immediately preceding the prayer (iqama) was about (to be made) al-Husayn came out (before the people) dressed in a waist-cloth (czar) and cloak (rida') and wearing a pair of sandals. He praised and glorified God, then he said:

People, I did not come to you until your letters came to me, and they were brought by your messengers (saying), 'Come to us for we have no Imam. Through you may God unite us under guidance and truth.' Since this was your view, I have come to you. Therefore give me what you guaranteed in your covenants and (sworn) testimonies. If you will not and (if you) are (now) averse to my coming, I will leave you (and go back) to the place from which I came. They were silent before him. Not one of them said a word.

"Recite the iqama," he said to the caller for prayer (mu'adhdhin) and he recited the iqama.

"Do you want to lead your followers in prayer?" he asked al-Hurr b. Yazid.

"No," he replied, "but you pray and we will pray (following the lead of) your prayer."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, prayed before them. Then he returned (to his tent) and his followers gathered around him. Al-Hurr went back to the place where he had positioned (his men) and entered a tent which had been put up for him. A group of his followers gathered around him while the rest returned to their ranks, which they had been in and which now they went back to. Each of them held the reins of his mount and sat in the shade (of its body).

At the time for the afternoon (asr) prayer, al-Husayn, peace be on him, ordered his followers to prepare for departure. Then he ordered the call to be made, and the call for the 'asr prayer was made, and the iqama. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, came forward, stood and prayed. Then he said the final greeting (of the prayer) and turned his face towards them (al-Hurr's men). He praised and glorified God and said:

People, if you fear God and recognise the rights of those who have rights, God will be more satisfied with you. We are the House of Muhammad and as such are more entitled to the authority (wilaya) of this affair (i.e. the rule of the community) over you than these pretenders who claim what does not belong to them. They have brought tyranny and aggression among you. If you refuse (us) because you dislike (us) or do not know our rights, and your view has now changed from what came to us in your letters and what your messengers brought, then I will leave you.

"By God," declared al-Hurr, "I know nothing of these letters and messengers which you mention."

"Uqba b. Siman," al-Husayn, peace be on him, called to one of his followers, "bring out the two saddle-bags in which the letters to me are kept."

He brought out two saddle-bags which were full of documents, and they were put before him.

"We are not among those who wrote these letters to you," said al-Hurr, "and we have been ordered that

when we meet you we should not leave you until we have brought you to Kufa to 'Ubayd Allah."

"Death will come to you before that (happens)," al-Husayn, peace be on him, told him. Then he ordered his followers, "Get up and get mounted."

They got mounted and (then) waited until their women had been mounted, "Depart," he ordered his followers.

When they set out to leave, the men (with al-Hurr) got in between them and the direction they were going in.

"May God deprive your mother of you," said al-Husayn, peace be on him, to al-Hurr, "what do you want?"

"If any of the Arabs other than you were to say that to me," retorted al-Hurr, "even though he were in the same situation as you, I would not leave him without mentioning his mother being deprived (of him), whoever he might be. But by God there is no way for me to mention your mother except by (saying) the best things possible."

"What do you want?" al-Husayn, peace be on him, demanded.

"I want to go with you to the governor, Ubayd Allah," he replied.

"Then by God I will not follow you."

"Then by God I will not let you (go anywhere else)."

These statements were repeated three times, and when their conversation was getting more (heated) al-Hurr said: "I have not been ordered to fight you. I have only been ordered not to leave you until I come with you to Kufa. If you refuse (to do that), then take any road which will not bring you into Kufa nor take you back to Medina, and let that be a compromise between us while I write to the governor, 'Ubayd Allah. Perhaps God will cause something to happen which will relieve me from having to do anything against you. Therefore take this (road) here and bear to the left of the road (to) al-Udhayb and al-Qadisiyya."

Al-Husayn, peace be on him, departed and al-Hurr with his followers (also) set out travelling close by him, while al-Hurr was saying to him:

Al-Husayn, I remind you (before) God to (think of) your life; for I testify that you will be killed if you fight.

"Do you think that you can frighten me with death?" said al-Husayn, peace be on him. "Could a worse disaster happen to you than killing me? I can only speak (to you) as the brother of al-Aws said to his cousin when he wanted to help the Apostle of God, may God bless him and grant him and his family peace. His cousin feared for him and said: 'Where are you going, for you will be killed?' but he replied:

I will depart for there is no shame in death for a young man, whenever he intends (to do what is) right and he strives like a Muslim, (Who) has soothed righteous men through (the sacrifice of) his life, who has scattered the cursed and opposed the criminal.

If I live, I will not regret (what I have done) and if I die, I will not suffer. Let it be enough for you to live in humiliation and be reviled.

When al-Hurr heard that he drew away from him. He and his followers travelled on one side (of the road) while al-Husayn, peace be on him, travelled on the other, until they reached Udhayb al-Hijanat. Al-Husayn, peace be on him, went on to Qasr Bani Muqatil. He stopped there and there a large tent had (already) been erected.

"Whose is that?" he asked.

"That belongs to Ubayd Allah b. al-Hurr al-Jufi," he was told. "Ask him to come to me," he said.

The messenger went to him and said: "This is al-Husayn b. Ali, peace be on him, and he asks you to come to him."

"We belong to God and to Him we shall return," said 'Ubayd Allah. "By God, I only left Kufa out of dread that al-Husayn, peace be on him, would enter Kufa while I was there. By God, I do not want to see him, nor him to see me."

The messenger returned to him (al-Husayn). Al-Husayn, peace be on him, rose and went over to him. He greeted him and sat down. Then he asked him to go with him. Ubayd Allah b. al-Hurr repeated what he had said before and sought to excuse himself from what he was asking him (to do).

"If you are not going to help us," al-Husayn, peace be on him, said to him, "then be sure that you are not one of those who fight against us. For, by God, no one will hear our cry and not help us without being destroyed."

"As for that (fighting against you)," he replied, "it will never happen, if God, the Exalted, wishes."

Then al-Husayn, peace be on him, left him and continued to his camp. Towards the end of the night, he ordered his boys to get provisions of water. Then he ordered the journey (to continue). He set out from Qasr Bani Muqatil.

Part 4

[Uqba b. Sim'an reported:]

We set out at once with him and he became drowsy while he was on his horse's back. He woke up, saying: "We belong to God and to Him we will return. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds."

He did that twice or three times, then his son, 'Ali b. al-Husayn approached him and asked: "Why are you praising God and repeating the verse of returning to Him?"

"My son," he answered, "I nodded off and a horseman appeared to me, riding a horse and he said: 'Men are travelling and the fates travel towards them.' Then I knew it was our own souls announcing our deaths to us."

"Father," asked (the youth), "does God regard you as evil? Are we not in the right?"

"Indeed (we are)," he answered, "by Him to Whom all His servants must return."

"Father," said (the youth), "then we need have no concern, if we are going to die righteously."

"May God give you the best reward a son can get for (his behaviour towards) his father," answered al-Husayn, peace be on him.

In the morning, he stopped and prayed the morning prayer. Then he hurried to remount and to continue the journey with his followers, veering to the left with the intention of separating from (al-Hurr's men).

However al-Hurr b. Yazid came towards him and stopped him and his followers (from going in that direction) and he began to (exert pressure to) turn them towards Kufa, but they resisted him. So they stopped (doing that) but they still accompanied them in the same way until they reached Ninawa, (which was) the place where al-Husayn, peace be on him, stopped. Suddenly there appeared a rider on a fast mount, bearing weapons and carrying a bow on his shoulder, coming from Kufa. They all stopped and watched him. When he reached them, he greeted al-Hurr and his followers and did not greet al-Husayn and his followers. He handed a letter from Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad to al-Hurr. In it (was the following):

When this letter reaches you and my messenger comes to you, make al-Husayn come to a halt. But only let him stop in an open place without vegetation. I have ordered my messenger to stay with you and not to leave you until he brings me (news of) your carrying out my instructions. Greetings.

When al-Hurr had read the letter, he told them: "This is a letter from the governor Ubayd Allah. He has ordered me to bring you to a halt at a place which his letter suggests. This is his messenger and he has ordered him not to leave me until I carry out the order with regard to you."

Yazid (b. Ziyad) b. al-Muhajir al-Kindi who was with al-Husayn, peace be on him, looked at the messenger of Ibn Ziyad and he recognized him.

"May your mother be deprived of you," he exclaimed, "what a business you have come to!"

"I have obeyed my Imam and remained faithful to my pledge of allegiance," (the other man) answered.

You have been disobedient to your Lord and have obeyed your Imam in bringing about the destruction of your soul," responded Ibn al-Muhajir. "You have acquired (eternal) shame (for yourself) and (the

punishment of) Hell–fire. What a wicked Imam your Imam is! Indeed God has said: ***we have made them Imams who summon (people) to Hellfire and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped*** [28:41]. Your Imam is one of those.

Al–Hurr b. Yazid began to make the people stop in a place that was without water and where there was no village.

"Shame upon you, let us stop at this village or that one," said al– Husayn, peace be on him. He meant by this, Ninawa and al– Ghadiriyya, and by that, Shufayya."

"By God, I cannot do that," replied (al–Hurr), "for this man has been sent to me as a spy."

"Son of the Apostle of God," said Zuhayr b. al–Qayn, "I can only think that after what you have seen, the situation will get worse than what you have seen. Fighting these people, now, will be easier for us than fighting those who will come against us after them. For by my life, after them will come against us such (a number) as we will not have the power (to fight) against."

"I will not begin to fight against them," answered al–Husayn.

That was Thursday, 2nd of (the month of) Muharram in the year 61 A.H. (680). On the next day, Umar b. Sad b. Abi Waqqas, set out from Kufa with four thousand horsemen. He stopped at Ninawa and sent for 'Urwa b. Qays al–Ahmasi and told him: "Go to him (al– Husayn) and ask him: What brought you, and what do you want?"

Urwa was one of those who had written to al–Husayn, peace be on him, and he was ashamed to do that. The same was the case with all the leaders who had written to him, and all of them refused and were unwilling to do that. Kathir b. Abd Allah al–Shabi stood up – he was a brave knight who never turned his face away from anything – and said: "I will go to him. By God, if you wish, I will rush on him."

"I don't want you to attack him," said 'Umar, "but go to him and ask him what has brought him."

As Kathir was approaching him, Abu Thumama al–Saidi saw him and said to al–Husayn, "May God benefit you, Abu Abd Allah, the wickedest man in the land, the one who has shed the most blood and the boldest of them all in attack, is coming towards you."

Then (Abu Thumama) stood facing him and said: "Put down your sword."

"No, by God," he replied, "I am only a messenger. If you will listen to me, I will tell you (the message) which I have been sent to bring to you. If you refuse, I will go away."

"I will take the hilt of your sword," answered (Abu Thumama), "and you can say what you need to."

"No, by God, you will not touch it," he retorted.

"Then tell me what you have brought and I will inform him for you. But I will not let you go near him, for you are a charlatan."

They both (stood there and) cursed each other. Then (Kathir) went back to Umar b. Sa'd and told him the news (of what had happened). Umar summoned Qurra b. Qays al-Hanzali and said to him: "Shame upon you Qurra, go and meet al-Husayn and ask him what brought him and what he wants."

Qurra began to approach him. When al-Husayn, peace be on him, saw him approaching, he asked: "Do you know that man?"

"Yes," replied Habib b. Muzahir, "he is from the Hanzala clan of Tamim. He is the son of our sister. I used to know him as a man of sound judgment. I would not have thought that he would be present at this scene."

He came and greeted al-Husayn, peace be on him. Then he informed him of 'Umar b. Sa'd's message.

"The people of this town of yours wrote to me that I should come," answered al-Husayn, peace be on him. "However, if now you have come to dislike me, then I will leave you."

"Shame upon you, Qurra," Habib b. Muzahir said to him, "will you return to those unjust men? Help this man through whose fathers (father & grandfather) God will grant you (great) favour."

"I will (first) return to my leader with the answer to his message," replied Qurra, "and then I will reflect on my views."

He went back to 'Umar b. Sa'd and gave him his report.

"I hope that God will spare me from making war on him and fighting against him," said 'Umar and then he wrote to 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

I am (writing this from) where I have positioned myself, what he wants, he answered: 'The people of this land wrote to me and their messengers came to me asking me to come and I have done so. However if (now) they have come to dislike me and (the position) now appears different to them from what their messengers brought to me, I will go away from them.

[Hassan b. Qa'id al-'Absi reported:]

I was with 'Ubayd Allah when this letter came to him, he read it and then he recited:

Now when our claws cling to him, he hopes for escape but he will be prevented (now) from (getting) any refuge.

He wrote to 'Umar b. Sa'd:

Your letter has reached me and I have understood what you mentioned. Offer al-Husayn (the opportunity) of him and all his followers pledging allegiance to Yazid. If he does that, we will then see what our judgement will be.

When the answer reached Umar b. Sa'd, he said: "I fear that 'Ubayd Allah will not accept that I should be spared (fighting al-Husayn)."

(Almost immediately) after it, there came (another) letter from Ibn Ziyad (in which he said):

Prevent al-Husayn and his followers from (getting) water. Do not let them taste a drop of it just as was done with 'Uthman b. Affan.

At once Umar b. Sa'd sent Amr b al-Hajjaj with five hundred horsemen to occupy the path to the water and prevent al-Husayn and his followers from (getting) water in order that they should (not) drink a drop of it. That was three days before the battle against al-Husayn, peace be on him.

Abd Allah b. al-Husayn al-Azdi, who was numbered among Bajila, called out at the top of his voice: "Husayn, don't you see that the water is as if in the middle of heaven. By God, you will not taste a drop of it until you die of thirst."

"O God, make him die of thirst and never forgive him", cried al-Husayn, peace be on him.

Part 5

[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, may 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) you 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 to accept this from him," demanded Shimr 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) most 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. Sa'd 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, 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 in any 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 Shimr b. Dhi al-Jawshan. We have given him our authority. Greetings.

Shimr b. Dhi al-Jawshan brought the letter to 'Umar b. Sa'd. 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 Shimr. "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) Shimr 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 it to 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. Sa'd, 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.

Part 6

[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) obligation 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 you. 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; and 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 Dharr 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 realised 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, Fatima, 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 sand grouse 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 (forever). 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.

[Quran 3:117-118]

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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