

The Great Struggle of Muslim Ibn Aqeel

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The Imam sent three people with Muslim: Qays Ibn Mash'ar al-Saydawi, 'Imarah Ibn 'Abdullah al-Saluli and 'Abdul Rahman Ibn 'Abdullah al-Azdi. The Imam said to Muslim, "Fear God, and check to see if whatever the people of Kufah are saying in their letters is true. If that is the case, write me a letter immediately about the situation."

Muslim left Mecca on the 15th of Ramadan traveling by way of Medinah. He went to Masjid al-Nabi and prayed there. Then he bade farewell to his relatives and asked two people to help lead the way for him to Kufah. On the way, they were lost and decided to stop, but Muslim kept going. He did not stop until he reached a place called Batn al-Khabt where he found some water and stayed. He immediately sent a messenger to Imam Husayn and informed him of what happened. The Imam replied that he should continue towards Kufah without any delay.

On his way he stayed near the water of the tribe of Tay, then he left. He arrived in Kufah on the 5th of Shawwal and went to the house of Mukhtar Ibn Abi Ubayd al-Thaqafi who was an intelligent, experienced person and a follower of the People of the House. From his arrival, all the Followers of Kufah gathered to Muslim's house expressing their welcome and obedience to the Imam. After Muslim read the Imam's letter to them, 'Abis Ibn Shabib al-Shakiri stood up and said, "I am not talking on behalf of these people and I do not know what they have in mind and I do not deceive you. I swear by God I tell you what I believe and what I will do, I will be there whenever you call me and I fight for you against your enemy, and I shall use my sword for you, until I reach my Lord, and I do not need anything but nearness to God."

Habib Ibn Muzahir stood and said, "You said what is in your heart briefly, and I swear by God that I say the same thing." Sa'id Ibn 'Abdullah al-Hanafi stood and said similar things and then people paid allegiance to Muslim, and they were counted as 18,000, and in another report 25,000, and in Shi'bi's report, 40,000. Then, Muslim wrote a letter to the Imam and sent it with 'Abis Ibn Shabib al-Shakiri, explaining the situation and the intense desire of the people for his arrival. In his letter he said, "A leader does not lie to his people. The people of Kufah, so far, have paid allegiance to me, 18,000 of them, so depart for Kufah as you receive my letter."

This happened twenty-seven nights before Muslim's death. The Kufans wrote to the Imam, "Continue on your way. You have 100,000 swords here. Please do not hesitate to come as soon as possible."

Meanwhile, those who were allied with the Umayyads, such as 'Umar Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas wrote to Yazid telling him of the movement of Muslim and the people of Kufah and pointing out that his present governor, an-Nu'man Ibn Bashir is not fit to stand against them. Yazid consulted his Christian chief advisor, Sirjawn. He advised Yazid to replace the governor with 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad who was a known bastard. Marjanah is his mother and he is called Ibn Ziyad even though the identity of his father is not known. Sirjawn reminded Yazid that his father, Mu'awiyah adopted Ibn Ziyad and trained him in the military, and added that it was Mu'awiyah's wish to use Ibn Ziyad. Then, he gave Yazid a letter sealed by Mu'awiyah, predicting the importance of Ibn Ziyad in difficult situations. Yazid immediately opened the letter and implemented his father's plan.

'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad was in Basrah, not far from Kufah. Yazid wrote to him, "Go to Kufah, capture Muslim Ibn 'Aqil, and see what is appropriate to imprison him, send him to exile, or kill him."

Ibn Ziyad went with five hundred people from Basrah and he did not delay or stop for any reason. Some of his people got sick on the way, and he left them to die in the desert. When he arrived in al-Qadisiyyah, his servant, Mahran, fell behind, and Ibn Ziyad left him to die. Before he reached the city, Ibn Ziyad dressed up like Imam Husayn so that, when he passed through the guards and the people, they would think that he was the Imam. They came to him and said, "O, grandson of the Prophet of God," but he did not reply at all. When he reached Kufah from the Najaf entrance, people came to him welcoming him with one voice, but he did not reply and continued immediately towards Qasr al-Imarah, the castle of the governor. When he knocked on the door, the governor an-Nu'man did not open. Instead, he went up to the roof and said, "O Son of the Messenger of God! I am not going to welcome you in this castle!"

Ibn Ziyad said, "Open the door, your night will be too long." When someone heard him and realized that it was a trick, he said, "O people! I swear by the Ka'bah that this is Ibn Ziyad, not Imam Husayn!" The people all ran away to their houses, and in the morning Ibn Ziyad announced a meeting in Masjid al-Kufah, and made a speech warning them and encouraging the enemies of the Prophet's House by giving bribes. He said, "Anyone who helps the enemy of the governor and does not report that to us will be hanged in front of his own house!"

MUSLIM STANDS

Ibn Ziyad immediately went hunting after Muslim. When Muslim heard about the speech of Ibn Ziyad and his threat, he decided to find a new place to stay. That night, he secretly left the

house of Mukhtar and went to the house of Hani Ibn 'Urwah who was Sheikh of the tribe of Murad. He had 4,000 cavalry and 8,000 infantry, not including their other allies, which would be 30,000 all together. At that time, a man named Sharik Ibn 'Abdullah al-A'war was also visiting Hani. Ibn Ziyad and he were both from Basrah, so when Sharik became sick Ibn Ziyad came to visit.

Sharik told Muslim that this was the perfect time to kill Ibn Ziyad. While they were talking, Ibn Ziyad came in. Muslim hid. Sharik was nervous and said something to signify to Muslim to come and kill Ibn Ziyad.

Ibn Ziyad looked at Hani and said, "It seems your cousin (Sharik) is hallucinating." Hani replied, "He has been talking nonsense for a while, ever since he got sick. He does not know what he is saying. After Ibn Ziyad left, Sharik asked Muslim, "Why did you not come to kill him?" Muslim replied, "For two reasons: First, I heard the Hadith of the Prophet saying, "Innal iman qayd ul-fatk" (a believer does not assassinate anybody by deception), and second, Hani's wife took my hand and made me swear to God not to kill him, crying and begging me not to." When Hani heard that, he said, "Ya wailah! She has killed me, killed herself, and killed everybody by what she has done!"

Sharik died after three days of his sickness. Ibn Ziyad honored him at his funeral. Later, when Ibn Ziyad realized that Sharik was helping to hide Muslim, he wanted to exhume his body, but he did not because it was buried near the grave of one of his own relatives.

Meanwhile, the Followers were secretly contacting Muslim in Hani's house. Finally, Ibn Ziyad hired a slave named Ma'qil and gave him 3,000 Dinars to report on the Followers. Ma'qil disguised himself as a person from Syria and said he was the slave of a tribe of Followers called Dhul-Kila and God has given him guidance to convert, and when he heard that there was someone following Imam Husayn, he came to help. He said he had money to give to the representative of the Imam.

Ma'qil went to the masjid and infiltrated the people who were devoted to prayer. He saw Ibn 'Awsajah al-Asadi and got close to him. He told him that he had money for the Imam and he did not know what to do with it. So, Ibn 'Awsajah prayed for him and led him to Muslim Ibn 'Aqil. Muslim gave it to Abi Thumlah al-Sa'idi who was in charge of money. Everyday, this Ma'qil came to Muslim in Hani's house and reported to Ibn Ziyad all the activities of the Followers.

HANI IBN 'URWAH

When Ibn Ziyad was sure of Muslim's residence in Hani's house, he sent spies to watch the

activities outside and inside the house and see who comes and who does not. Then, he sent some people to Hani, saying, "The governor missed you and he asked about your health and we have told him that you are an old man and cannot come, but he said he wanted to see you." They insisted that Hani would visit the governor. He refused, but they insisted and finally succeeded. When he arrived in the castle, Ibn Ziyad said to him, "A traitor comes on his feet!" Shurayh al-Qadi sat by his side as Ibn Ziyad said to Hani, "You have brought Muslim Ibn 'Aqil to your house! You have gathered arms for him!" Hani denied. When the argument became heated, Ibn Ziyad called Ma'qil. Then Hani said to Ibn Ziyad, "You know I know your father, and I would like you to be honored, I would like to advise you. You and your people should leave this city and go to Sham (Syria) because now we have someone who is more deserving to be obeyed than you and your friends."

Ibn Ziyad said, "You are not going to leave me until you bring him to me." Hani said, "If he was under my feet, I would not lift my feet for you."

Ibn Ziyad threatened him with death, and Hani replied, "That would be a declaration of war." Ibn Ziyad took his sword and cut Hani's nose with it, then ordered the guards to take him down to the dungeon. 'Amr Ibn Hajjaj, Hani's brother in law, heard that Hani was killed. He and a group of his tribe went and surrounded the castle. Ibn Ziyad ordered Shurayh al-Qadi to announce that Hani is alive and not dead. When he did that, they left, but he never told them that Hani was in the dungeon. When Shurayh went to the dungeon to see Hani, Hani said to him, "Ten of my people would take me away from this."

Shurayh did not even let Hani know that his people actually did come, but they were tricked.

Instead, he told Hani not to worry and everything will be fine. When Muslim heard the news about Hani he left Hani's house and called his followers. They gathered, and there were 4,000 in all. They chanted the slogan of the Muslims at the battle of Badr during the time of the Prophet. Muslim divided them into four groups and they marched towards the castle. Ibn Ziyad had only thirty people. He locked all the doors and told Shurayh al-Qadi to deceive the people. Shurayh went to the roof of the castle and announced, "O people of Kufah! Do not kill yourselves. An army of reinforcements is coming from the capital Damascus!"

One by one they left, and the four thousand shrank to three hundred, then to thirty, then when Muslim started praying the 'Esha -Evening- Prayer, there were only three people behind him. When he finished praying, there was no one left. He walked around the streets of Kufah, not knowing where to go.

When Ibn Ziyad realized that his trick worked, he sent his spies to look from the high towers of

the castle to check the reaction of the people. When he noticed that not many people were around, he ordered soldiers to see if any of the people left were rebellious. Then he tied torches to ropes and lowered them from the roof of the castle over the wall of the masjid to see if there was anybody hiding there.

When they could not find anyone, Ibn Ziyad announced that anyone who gives shelter to Muslim would be killed, and he ordered his soldiers to search all the houses and capture Muslim. Then, he ordered guards at the entrance of the city to catch all of those who were on Muslim's side. Meanwhile, Mukhtar Ibn 'Ubaydullah al-Thaqafi was in his village, Khatwaniyyah. Ibn Ziyad ordered everyone to denounce Imam Husayn and carry the white flag of surrender, and everyone did, including Mukhtar, but Ibn Ziyad ordered to imprison Mukhtar and 'Amr Ibn al-Harith, and hit them with his sword. They remained in prison until the day of Ashura. ¹

Muslim walked alone in the streets of Kufah in the neighborhood of Kindah. After some time, he became tired and stood in the middle of the street. The owner of one of the houses there was a woman called Taw'ah who had a son named Bilal. She was looking for her son to come home but she saw Muslim standing in the street. She did not recognize him at first, but when she realized that he was Muslim Ibn 'Aqil, she gave him shelter, fed him, and kept him in a different room than her son's. When her son came home and saw his mother going to the other room, he asked her what was going on, and she refused to tell him. He kept insisting until, after making him promise to keep it secret, she told him.

But, in the morning, her son Bilal went and told Ibn Ziyad where Muslim was. Ibn al-'Ash'ath came with seventy soldiers to capture Muslim at dawn while he was praying. When he heard horses galloping, Muslim knew that he was discovered. He finished his prayer and said to Taw'ah, "You have done what you should do, may the Messenger of God intercede for you. Yesterday, I dreamed that my uncle 'Ali, Leader of the Faithful, told me: You will be with me tomorrow."

The soldiers got off their horses and came in, but Muslim went to them, fought them, and forced them out of the house. He fought bravely, pushing all of the soldiers back into the street and killing forty-one of them. He fought with the strength of a man that knows it is his last fight. He cut, hit, and pushed soldiers out of his way. Some of them, he grabbed by their hands and threw them onto the rooftops. With more than half of his troops dead and the rest injured, the leader sent a message to Ibn Ziyad requesting more troops. Ibn Ziyad responded, "What? I sent you out to get one man, not an army!"

The leader replied, "Do you think you want me to catch a grocery boy of Kufah? You want me to

capture a sword of the People of Muḥammad!" Muslim fought one-on-one and hit Bukayr twice. Bukayr's sword hit Muslim on his mouth and cut his upper lip. Muslim hit him on his head and neck and killed him. They realized that they could not get him one by one, so they went on the rooftops and hit him with stones. Then, they set reeds on fire and threw them at him.

He said:

"I swear I am not going to die except as a free man!

Though death is a bad thing,

Everyone faces difficulty some day.

Hot and cold would mix one day.

His soul would return to him, and be permanent.

I am afraid that I would be lied to, or deceived."

He became weak from his wounds and loss of blood and he leaned against a wall. They continued shooting arrows and throwing rocks until he said, "Why do you throw rocks on me and we are the family of the Prophets? We are not unbelievers!" Ibn al-'Ash'ath, the chief of the army, came close to him and said, "Do not kill yourself, you are under my protection." Muslim answered, "I am not going to be captured as long as I have power. No! That will never happen!" Muslim attacked him and the chief ran away. Once he retreated away from Muslim, the chief gave the order and the soldiers all attacked at once from all sides. Someone hit Muslim from behind. He fought and retreated backwards until he fell into a covered pit that they dug as a trap for him. After he fell into the pit, they took his sword from his hand and captured him.

When they took his sword away from him, he cried.

MUSLIM MEETS IBN ZIYAD

They brought him to Ibn Ziyad and when Muslim saw water he asked for some. Bahili said to him, "You are not going to taste this water until you taste the fire of Hell."

Muslim said, "Who Are You? You are the one who deserves the fire!" And sat at the wall of the castle. Later, a woman named 'Umarah gave him a bowl of water. Whenever Muslim tried to drink, the bowl became filled with his own pouring blood. After the third time trying to drink the water, all of his teeth fell into the bowl. He gave up and put the bowl down. Then, the guards took him inside and ordered him to say 'Salaam Alaykum' to the new governor, Ibn Ziyad. Muslim replied, "Shut up! He is your governor. I say Salaam to whoever follows the truth!" Ibn

Ziyad laughed and said, "If you say 'Salaam Alaykum' or not, you are going to die anyway."

Muslim said, "If you kill me, there have been better people than me killed by worse people than

you." Ibn Ziyad said, "You have rebelled against your leader, you have divided Muslims and have created disorder." Muslim said, "Indeed, Mu'awiyah and his son Yazid have divided Muslims and created disorder. And your father is the beginning of disorder! I wish to reach martyrdom at the hands of the worst person in the world."

Then Muslim asked someone in the court to write a will for him. He looked at the people and recognized 'Umar Ibn Sa'd 1 and asked if he would carry his will but 'Umar refused. Ibn Ziyad ordered him to take it because he wanted to find out for himself what Muslim would write. Muslim went to 'Umar and said, "First pay the loan I took when I came to Ziyad, six hundred Dirhams. Second, take my body from Ibn Ziyad and give it an Islamic burial. Third, write to Imam Husayn and tell him what happened to me."

'Umar Ibn Sa'd immediately went to Ibn Ziyad and revealed it to him. Ibn Ziyad said to 'Umar Ibn Sa'd, "The trustworthy one never betrays you but sometimes you trust a liar." Then, he came to Muslim and said, "You came to people and divided them." Muslim replied, "No! Never! I did not come for that, but people of this city claim that your father has killed their best people and we came to bring justice and to implement the Qur'an."

Ibn Ziyad said, "That is not your business, we were giving them justice." Muslim said, "God knows that you are not truthful and you kill people without justice." Then Ibn Ziyad cursed Imam 'Ali and Imam Husayn, and Muslim said, "You and your father deserve that more than anyone else." Ibn Ziyad ordered a man from Syria to take Muslim to the roof, cut his head off, and throw his body down into the street. He took him to the roof while Muslim was saying, "Subhanallah! O God, judge between us and these people who betrayed us, deceived us, and denied us." Then he turned his face to Medinah and said, "Assalamu 'ela al-Husayn." The Syrian killed him and dropped his head and his body to the ground. When he killed Muslim, he saw a strange and horrifying vision. After he killed Muslim, the man came to Ibn Ziyad, afraid, and said, "When I killed him I saw a man pointing to me, and it scared me."

Ibn Ziyad waved him away and ordered Hani to be taken to the market. They tied Hani up and took him, and no one helped him. Hani struggled and managed to untie the ropes. He got out of the ropes, picked up a stick, and fought with it, but the guards lunged at him all at once and killed him with their swords.

Ibn Ziyad ordered the bodies of both Muslim and Hani to be dragged up and down the streets of Ziyad, and then hung upside down in a place called Kunnasah. He sent their heads to Yazid who hung them at the city wall of Damascus, his capital. With the heads, Ibn Ziyad sent a letter to Yazid, "Thank God that the leader of the faithful (Amir ul-Mu'minin)¹ was successful. We captured Muslim in the house of Hani. I scattered spies around them until I found them. I cut

off their heads and sent them to you by two people who are reliable, and the Leader of the faithful can ask them about the details."

Yazid replied to Ibn Ziyad, "You did what a wise man has to do, you spoke the truth, as I believed in you. I asked the two messengers the details and I have heard that Husayn Ibn 'Ali has gone towards Iraq. Keep your eyes open and kill people whom you are suspicious of. Do not wait for any proof. Husayn is the problem. Either you fight him or you send him to me."

MUSLIM'S SONS

Two of Muslim's sons were in Ziyad. Al-Saduq (d. 381/991 CE) narrates in his book, al-'Amali, by his chain of Isnad from an old man of Ziyad, who said, "When the Imam was killed, two of Muslim's children, Muhammad and Ibrahim, were captured. Ibn Ziyad put them in jail and ordered to give them a hard time. The two kids fasted all day and every night they were given one loaf of bread and water. They stayed that way for about a year. One night, they talked with each other and decided to tell the jailer about their identity so he might make it easy for them.

That night, the youngest one asked the man, "Do you know who Muhammad was?"

He said, "Of course I know Muhammad. He is the Prophet of God."

"Do you know Ja'far Ibn Abi Talib"

"Of course, I know him. He is known as Dhul-Janahayn 1-the one with two wings. -"

"Do you know 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib' "Of course I know him, He is the cousin of the Prophet." Then he said, "O Guard! We are children of the Prophet. We are the children of Muslim Ibn 'Aqil and you are being so hard on us." The old man collapsed at their feet and said, "O, the family of the

Prophet! The door of the prison will be open for you. Go wherever you want to go."

He gave them water and bread and showed them the way and advised them not to move in the daytime and go only in the night. One night, after they escaped, they ended up at the door of an old woman. They said, "O, old woman! We are strangers here and we do not know the way, would you let us with you for one night and in the day we will leave?"

She sheltered them and when she asked them who they were they said, "We are the family of the Prophet and we ran away from the prison of Ibn Ziyad." She said, "I have a son-in-law who was on the side of Ibn Ziyad in Karbala' and I am afraid that he would catch you." She brought them food and water and they collapsed and fell asleep. During the night, the son-in-law came home unexpectedly. She asked him "What brought you here at this time?" He said, "I am searching for two prisoners who ran away from Ibn Ziyad's prison, and Ibn Ziyad has announced 1,000 Dirhams for the head of each of them. I am tired and I could not find them."

She warned him, "That is not the right thing to do with the family of the Prophet." He said, "You

seem to be taking sides, and you seem to know where they are. Let us take you to Ibn Ziyad!"

She answered, "What would the governor want with me?"

He said, "You have to open the door and give me shelter until I find these people." She opened it and fed him. During the night he heard the children's snoring and he searched the house until

he found them. The younger one asked, "Who are you?"

He said, "I am the owner of the house. Who are you?" The younger one said to the older one,

"Get up, it seems that we are trapped!" Again the man insisted, "Who are you?"

They answered, "If we tell you the truth, will you leave us alone?" He said, "Of course. You are in my house and the clemency of the Messenger of God is for you." After they told him everything, the man said, "You are indeed trapped, I praise God that He gave me success to capture you!"

He tied them with ropes and in the morning he called his black slave, Fulayh and asked him to take the two kids and kill them. While the man watched, the slave took them near the bank of the river to kill them.

One of the kids said to him, "We see that you have the color of Bilal, the caller to prayer of the Prophet, our grandfather." Fulayh asked, "Are you of the family of the Prophet Muhammad? What brought you here?" When they explained their story to him, he became very upset. Then,

he fell to his knees, kissed their feet, and said, "I am not going to do what this man says!"

He threw his sword far away, jumped into the river, and swam across to the other bank. Then, he stood up and said, "I am not your slave anymore!" After that, the man became upset that he lost his slave. He took the kids back to his home, called his son, and said to him, "I have collected the wealth of the world for you.

Take these two kids to the river and kill them and bring back their heads." While the son was taking them to the river, one of the kids asked him, "Are you not afraid of the Day of Judgment?"

We are the family of the Prophet. Why does your father want to kill us?"

When the son realized that they were telling the truth, he did exactly as the slave did, and ran away swimming across to the other bank. When the man saw this, he said, "I have to kill you myself."

The kids asked him, "Why do you not sell us in the street and use the money for yourself without making the Prophet your enemy on the Day of Judgment?" He said, "The governor, Ibn Ziyad, would give me 2,000 pieces and you two will not sell for 2,000!" The kids asked, "Why do you not take us alive to Ibn Ziyad? Let him decide what to do with us. Why do you not have some mercy on us?" He said, "I have no mercy for you in my heart."

They asked if they could pray for a few minutes. He laughed and said, "Go pray as much as you like! Prayer will not help you!" They prayed four units, then raised their faces towards heaven,

and said, "O, God! The best Judge! Judge between us and this man by truth." When they were done, he chopped off the head of the older one first. The younger one hugged his dead brother's body. The man said, "Do not cry, I am going to let you join him soon," and then killed him. He dropped the bodies in the river and took the heads to Ibn Ziyad.

Ibn Ziyad was sitting on his throne. When he recognized the heads, he asked, "How did you get them?" After the man explained the whole story, Ibn Ziyad said, "So, they were your guests and you did not respect the rights of guests in your own home?" Then Ibn Ziyad said, "God is indeed the best judge, and you deserve to be killed in the same spot where you killed them. Why did you not bring them to me?"

He ordered someone to take him to the same spot and kill him. While the guards took him down the streets of Ziyad, children followed behind him, yelling at him and telling everyone that he is the killer of the People of the House of the Prophet. According to Mazrat Ahl ul-Bayt, page 93, "Their grave site is near al-Musayyab, on the way to Baghdad. Their names are Muhammad and Ibrahim. Apparently, their bodies were taken out of the river and buried immediately by some kind Muslims