

The Tragedy of the Two Young Sons of Muslim Ibn Aqil

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Muslim ibn 'Aqil had taken two of his sons to Kufah with him. The older son was called Muhammad and the younger Ibrahim. Both of them were under the age of ten years. When Muslim ibn 'Aqil realized how dangerous a threat Ibn Ziyad was, he called for Qadi Shurayh and handed over his two sons to him. Qadi Shurayh kept the two boys in his house until the martyrdom of Muslim ibn 'Aqil.

After the death of Muslim ibn 'Aqil, Ibn Ziyad issued a warning saying that anyone who was aware of the whereabouts of the sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil and did not inform him would be put to death. On hearing this, Qadi Shurayh went to the sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil. He showed them affection and kindness as he shed tears. The boys asked him, "Why are you weeping?" Shurayh replied, "Your father has been mercilessly killed." The children cried in grief, "O father! O exile!" After Shurayh had consoled them, he informed them of Ibn Ziyad's threats against them. Hearing this, the children stopped crying out of terror. Seeing this Shurayh said, "Do not be frightened. You are the apples of my eye. I will not allow any harm to come to you. I have arranged for you to be in the care of a trustworthy person who will see to it that you taken back to Medina."

Shurayh called for his son Asad and gave him the following instructions, "News has come to me that a caravan is preparing to depart for Medina. Take these children and hand them over to the trustworthy person who will see to it that they reach Medina safely." Shurayh kissed the two boys and gave them each 50 dinars. Then he bade them farewell and handed them over to his son Asad.

In the darkness of the night, Asad carried the two boys in his arms until he was a few kilometres outside Kufah in order to meet with the caravan. However, the caravan had set off before they arrived. The dark shapes of the rear of the caravan were barely visible in the distance. Asad bid the two orphans of Muslim ibn 'Aqil farewell and told to run after the caravan until they caught up with it. Under no circumstances were they to stop before they had reached it.

In the darkness of the night the two orphans started running through the desert towards the caravan. However, tiredness overcame them and they paused for a while. It was at this moment that an inhabitant from Kufah happened to be passing. He saw the two boys and recognised them as being the orphans of Muslim ibn 'Aqil. He seized them and brought them to Ibn Ziyad.

Ibn Ziyad summoned the jailor and handed the two orphans over to him. The jailor was a person by the name of Mashkur and he was among the lovers of the Household of the Prophet. When Mashkur learned of the identity of the two boys, he treated them with great kindness and affection and brought them food and water. Finally in the middle of the night, Mashkur decided to free the two boys. He gave them his ring and instructed them to go to Qadisiyyah where they would find his brother. He told them to give the ring to his brother who would then assist them to get to Medina. When news of Mashkur's freeing of the boys was given to Ibn Ziyad, he ordered him to be given fifty lashes. Mashkur died as the sentence was being carried out. On the same night Ibrahim and Muhammad, the sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil, left Kufah and started their journey towards Qadisiyyah. They walked all night. However, due to the darkness and the fact that they did not know the way, they found themselves still on the outskirts of Kufah in the morning. The frightened boys saw a palm-grove and went to it. There they hid themselves on top of a date palm.

An Ethiopian maid came to the palm-grove to drink some water from a pond underneath the tree in which the children were hiding. As she knelt down by the pond, she saw the reflection of the two children in the water. The maid quickly looked up at the tree and saw the young boys concealed in it. She treated them with kindness and gentleness and took them to her mistress, who was the wife of Harith ibn 'Urwah. As soon as this woman saw them, she put her arms around them and asked them who they were. They replied, "We are from the family of the Prophet and are the sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil." When she learned of their true identities, she showed them greater affection and embraced her maid in joy. However, she warned her to not to inform her husband Harith about the boys because she knew of his evil disposition. After the boys had eaten and gone to bed, Harith returned home in a state of rage. When Harith's wife asked him of the reason for his anger, he replied that that he had been in search of the two sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil who had been freed by Mashkur the jailor. He said that it had been announced in the palace of Ibn Ziyad that the one who captured the boys would be rewarded handsomely. However, despite a lengthy search during which his horse had died of exhaustion and in which he himself had become tired, he had been unable to find them. At this Harith's wife said, "May sorrow be your lot! Fear God and the day on which Muhammad the Messenger of Allah will be your opponent. Do not harm those children." Harith replied, "Silence! O woman! If I were to find them, I should be rewarded by vast amounts of gold and silver from Ibn Ziyad. Get up and prepare my supper."

After eating his supper Harith went to his bed. Muhammad and Ibrahim were asleep in one of the rooms. Suddenly Muhammad the elder brother of the two woke up from his sleep. He had

had a dream that had disturbed him. He said to Ibrahim, "Wake up! O brother! I have just had a dream and I am afraid that that we will soon be killed. I saw the Prophet with Imam Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and Lady Fatimah sitting in Paradise with our father. The Prophet looked at us and wept. Then he turned to our father and said, 'O Muslim! How could you leave your sons among the enemies?' At this our father said that they would be united with us tomorrow." Ibrahim replied, "I have had the same dream." The children embraced each other in the darkness of the night, frightened and not knowing what was to become of them.

Harith was woken from his sleep by the sound of the children's voices. Holding a candle he came inside the room and saw the two frightened children sitting in a corner of the room clinging to each other. He asked, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are your guests, the family of the Prophet. We are the sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil." Harith shouted angrily, "I have destroyed myself and my horse in searching for you while you were sitting inside my own house?"

Harith began to slap the children viciously. Then he tied their hands and feet and pushed them into a corner of the room. Harith's wife came to him and kissed his hands and feet begging him to not to harm the children as they were orphans and from the family of the Prophet and their guests. However, the hard-hearted man was without any compassion and paid no heed to her pleas. Thus the boys were left in that state until the morning.

In the morning Harith, with his sword in his hand and accompanied by his son and his servant, took the two sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil to the banks of the Euphrates. Harith's wife was crying and pleading with him as she followed them. However, whenever she got near to them, Harith would push her away with his sword. At the Euphrates Harith gave his sword to his servant and ordered him to behead the two boys. The servant refused to carry out his orders and Harith killed him. After this Harith handed the sword to his son and told him to behead the two children. At this his son replied, "I seek refuge with Allah! Never will I commit such a crime and I will not allow you to kill them." Harith's wife cried out, "What crime have these children committed? Take them alive to the governor." Harith answered, "I have no option but to kill them, I have no guarantee that members of the Shi'ah will not rescue them from me while I make my way to the governor."

At this Harith took hold of his sword with an intention of killing his own son. His wife screamed and begged for mercy but to no avail. Harith took his son's life. Then he turned to the children who were crying and shaking with fear at what they had witnessed. They children begged for some time for them to offer their final prayers but Harith did not grant them their wish. Harith grabbed hold of Muhammad but Ibrahim threw himself on Muhammad in an attempt to save

him. Muhammad did the same in order to save the life of his younger brother. Impatiently Harith struck his sword at Muhammad beheading him. Ibrahim grabbed the head of his brother in his lap. As he wept over his brother, Harith struck at Ibrahim neck beheading the orphan. Harith threw the headless bodies of the orphans of Muslim ibn 'Aqil in the river and placed their heads on a stake and set off to the palace of Ibn Ziyad.

The heads of the orphans of Muslim ibn 'Aqil were brought and placed in front of Ibn Ziyad. The latter asked, "Whose heads are these?" Harith replied, "These are the heads of your enemies whom I caught and beheaded in return for the reward that you promised." Ibn Ziyad asked, "Which of my enemies?" Harith answered, "The sons of Muslim ibn 'Aqil." Ibn Ziyad asked for the heads to be washed and brought on a tray. Then he gazed at them and said to

Harith, "May sorrow be your reward! What wrong did these children do to you?"

Ibn Ziyad called for his personal jester Muqatil who was a devoted lover of the Holy Family and to deny the murderer death at the hands of soldiers said, "This accursed man has killed these children without my permission. Take him to the banks of the Euphrates where he murdered the children and execute him as you will." Muqatil grabbed Harith by the shoulders and marched him through the streets of Kufah bare-footed and bare-headed as he showed the heads of the orphans to the onlookers shouting, "O people! This is the murderer of the two orphans of Muslim ibn 'Aqil." The people wept at the sight of the orphan's heads and cursed Harith. As Muqatil proceeded to the river, the people gathered with him to witness Harith's execution. When they arrived at the place where the children were killed, they found the dead bodies of Harith's son and his slave and his bruised wife crying over her son. The people were extremely disturbed at the scene.

Harith asked Muqatil to release him for the sum of ten thousand dinars. To this Muqatil replied, "By Allah! If all the wealth of the entire world were yours and you offered it to me, I would not accept. I desire to attain the Paradise of Allah by executing you." Muqatil cut off the hands and the feet of Harith. Then he cut off his ears and nose and tore out his stomach. After that the people burned his body.

((Ma'ali al-Sibtayn