

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

From one of his statements

قاله للأشعث بن قيس وهو على منبر الكوفة يخطب، فمضى في بعض كلامه شيء اعترضه الأشعث [في بعض النسخ: ... فيه]. فقال: يا أمير المؤمنين، هذه عليك لا لك، فخفض عليه السلام إليه بصره ثم قال:

Amīr al-Mu'minīn was delivering a lecture from the pulpit of (the mosque of) Kūfah when al-Ash'ath ibn Qays [1] objected and said, "O Amīr al-Mu'minīn this thing is not in your favour but against you." [2] Amīr al-Mu'minīn looked at him with anger and said:

مَا [فِي بَعْضِ النَّسْخِ: وَمَا] يُدْرِيكَ مَا عَلَيَّ مِمَّا لِي؟ عَلَيْكَ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَلَعْنَةُ الْأَعْيُنِ! حَائِكُ ابْنِ حَائِكٍ! مُنَافِقُ ابْنِ كَافِرٍ! وَاللَّهِ! لَقَدْ أُسِرَ الْكُفْرَ مَرَّةً وَالْإِسْلَامَ أُخْرَى! فَمَا فَدَاكَ مِنْ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهُمَا مَالِكٌ وَلَا حَسْبُكَ! وَإِنْ أَمْرًا دَلَّ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ السَّيْفِ، وَسَاقَ إِلَيْهِمُ الْحَتْفَ، لِحَرِي أَنْ يَمُقَّتَهُ الْأَقْرَبُ، وَلَا يَأْمَنَهُ الْأَبْعَدُ!

How do you know what is for me and what is against me?! Curse of Allāh and others be on you. You are a weaver and son of a weaver. You are the son of an unbeliever and yourself a hypocrite. You were arrested once by the Unbelievers and once by the Muslims, but your wealth and birth could not save you from either. The man who contrives for his own people to be put to sword and invites death and destruction for them does deserve that the near ones should hate him and the remote ones should not trust him.

[قال السيد الشريف: [يريد عليه السلام: أنه أُسِرَ فِي الْكُفْرِ مَرَّةً وَفِي الْإِسْلَامِ مَرَّةً. وَأَمَّا قَوْلُهُ: « دَلَّ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ السَّيْفِ »، فَأَرَادَ بِهِ: حَدِيثًا كَانَ لِلْأَشْعَثِ مَعَ خَالِدِ بْنِ الْوَلِيدِ بِالْيَمَامَةِ، غَرَّ فِيهِ قَوْمَهُ وَمَكَرَ بِهِمْ حَتَّى أَوْقَعَ بِهِمْ خَالِدًا، وَكَانَ قَوْمَهُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ يَسْمُونَهُ «عَرَفَ النَّارَ». وَهُوَ اسْمٌ لِلْغَادِرِ عِنْدَهُمْ.

as-Sayyid ar-Raḍī says: This man was arrested once when an unbeliever and once in days of Islam. As for Amīr al-Mu'minīn's words that the man contrived for his own people to be put to sword, the reference herein is to the incident which occurred to al-Ash'ath ibn Qays in confrontation with Khālid ibn Walīd at al-Yamāmah, where he deceived his people and contrived a trick till Khālid attacked them. After this incident his people nicknamed him "Urf an-Nār" which in the parlance stood for traitor.

Notes:

[1] AL-ASH'ATH IBN QAYS AL-KINDĪ

His original name was Ma'dī Karib and kunyah was Abū Muḥammad, but because of his dishevelled hair he is better known as al-Ash'ath (one having dishevelled hair). After the Bi'thah (Proclamation of Prophethood), when he came to Mecca along with his tribe, the Prophet invited him and his tribe to accept Islam. But all of them turned back without anyone accepting Islam. When after hijrah (immigration of the Holy Prophet), Islam became firmly established and in full swing and deputations began to come to Madīnah in large numbers, he also came to the Prophet's audience with a delegation of Banū Kindah and accepted Islam.

The author of al-Isti'āb writes that after the Prophet this man became an apostate, and during the caliphate of Abū Bakr, when he was brought to Madīnah as prisoner, he again accepted Islam; though this time too his Islam was a show. Thus, ash-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh writes in his annotations on Nahj al-Balāghah: Just as 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl was a companion of the Prophet, so was al-Ash'ath among the companions of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and both were high ranking hypocrites in his own time.

He lost one of his eyes in the battle of Yarmūk. Ibn Qutaybah has included him in the list of the one-eyed men in al-Ma'ārif. Abu Bakr's sister Umm Farwah bint Abī Quḥāfah, who was once the wife of an al-Azdī and later to Taym ad-Dārimī, was on the third occasion married to this al-Ash'ath. Three sons were born of them, viz. Muḥammad, Ismā'il, and Ishāq. Books on biography show that she too was blind in one eye.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd has quoted the following statement of Abū al-Faraj, wherefrom it appears that this man was equally involved in the assassination of Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a.s.):

On the night of the assassination, Ibn Muljam came to al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, and both retired to a corner of the mosque and sat there. When Ḥujr ibn 'Adī passed by that side and he heard al-Ash'ath saying to Ibn Muljam, "Be quick now or else dawn's light would disgrace you." On hearing this, Ḥujr said to al-Ash'ath, "O one-eyed man! You are preparing to kill 'Alī!" He then hastened toward 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, but when he did not find Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a.s.) and returned, Ibn Muljam had already carried out his deed, and the people were crying out: "Amīr al-Mu'minīn has been killed!"

It was his daughter, Ja'dah, who killed Imam Ḥasan (a.s.) by poisoning him. Al-Mas'ūdī has written that:

His (Ḥasan's) wife Ja'dah bint al-Ash'ath al-Kindiyah poisoned him, Mu'āwiyah

had conspired with her that if she could contrive to poison Ḥasan, he would pay her one hundred thousand dirhams and marry her to Yazīd.

His son Muḥammad ibn al-Ash'ath was active in playing fraud with Ḥaḍrat Muslim ibn 'Aqīl in Kūfah and in shedding Imam Ḥusayn's blood in Karbalā'. But despite all these points, he is among those from whom al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah have related traditions.

[2] After the battle of Nahrawān, Amīr al-Mu'minīn was delivering a sermon in the mosque of Kūfah about ill effects of taḥkīm (Arbitration) when a man stood up and said, "O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, first you desisted us from this Arbitration but thereafter you allowed it. We cannot understand which of these two was more correct and proper." On hearing this Amīr al-Mu'minīn clapped his one hand over the other and said, "This is the reward of one who gives up firm view." [Nahj al-balāghah, Sermon 121] That is, this is the outcome of your own actions, as you had abandoned firmness and caution and insisted on "Arbitration." But al-Ash'ath understood from this that Amīr al-Mu'minīn was speaking about himself, meaning that "my bewilderment and confusion are the result of having accepted Arbitration." So he spoke out, "O Amīr al-Mu'minīn! This brings blame on your own self." Whereupon Amir al-mu'minin said harshly: What do you know what I am saying, and what do you understand what is for me or against me. You are a weaver and the son of a weaver brought up by unbelievers and a hypocrite. Curse of Allāh and all the world be upon you.

Commentators have written several reasons for Amīr al-Mu'minīn calling al-Ash'ath a "ḥā'ik" (weaver):

The first reason is, because he and his father, like most of the people of his native place, pursued the industry of weaving cloth. So, in order to refer to the lowliness of his occupation, he has been called 'weaver'. Although the Yemenis had other occupations also but mostly this profession was their principal trade. Describing their occupations Khālid ibn Ṣafwān has mentioned this one first of all: What can I say about a people among whom there are only weavers, leather dyers, monkey trainers, and donkey riders? The hoopoe found them out, the mouse flooded them, and a woman ruled over them.

The second reason is that "ḥiyākah" means walking by swaying and bending on either side, and since out of pride and conceit this man used to walk shrugging his shoulders and making bends in his body, he has been called "ḥā'ik".

The third reason — and it is more conspicuous and clear one — is that he has been called a weaver to denote his foolishness and lowliness, because every low person is proverbially known as a weaver. Their wisdom and sagacity can be well gauged by the fact that their follies had become proverbial, while nothing attains proverbial status without peculiar characteristics. Now, that Amīr al-Mu'minīn has also confirmed it no further argument or reasoning is needed.

The fourth reason is that by this is meant the person who conspires against Allāh and the Holy Prophet and prepares webs of which is the peculiarity of hypocrites. Thus, in *Wasā'il ash-Shī'ah* it is stated: It was mentioned before Imam aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) that the weaver is accursed. He said: What is meant thereby is the one who concocts against Allāh and the Prophet. [*Wasā'il ash-Shī'ah*, vol. 12, p. 248, Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt edition, Qum, 1409 AH]

After the word “ḥā'ik”, Amīr al-Mu'minīn has used the word “munāfiq” (hypocrite), and there is no conjunction wāw in between them, in order to emphasise the nearness of meaning thereof. Then, on the basis of this hypocrisy and concealment of truth, he declared him deserving of the curse of Allāh and all others, as Allāh the Glorified says: “Verily, those that conceal what we have sent of (Our) manifest evidences and guidance, after what we have (so) clearly shown for man-kind in the Book (they are), those that Allāh doth curse them and (also) curse them all those who curse (such ones).” (Qur'ān, 2:159)

After this Amīr al-Mu'minīn says that “You could not avoid the degradation of being prisoner when you were unbeliever, nor did these ignominies spare you after acceptance of Islam, and you were taken prisoner again.”

When an unbeliever, the event of his being taken prisoner occurred in this way that, when the tribe of Banū Murād killed his father Qays, he (al-Ash'ath) collected the warriors of Banū Kindah and divided them in three groups. Over one group he himself took the command, and on the others he placed Kabsh ibn Hānī and Qash'am ibn Arqam as chiefs, and set off to deal with Banū Murād. But as misfortune would have it, instead of Banū Murād he attacked Banū al-Ḥārith ibn Ka'b. The result was that Kabsh ibn Hānī and Qash'am ibn Arqam were killed, and this man was taken prisoner alive. Eventually he got a release by paying three thousand camels as ransom. In Amīr al-Mu'minīn's words, “Your wealth or birth could not save you from either,” the reference is not to real 'fidyah' (release money) because he was actually released on payment of release money, but the intention is

that neither plenty of wealth nor his high position and prestige in his tribe could save him from this ignominy, and he could not protect himself from being a prisoner.

The event of his second imprisonment is that when the Holy Prophet of Islam passed away from this world, a rebellion occurred in the region of Ḥaḍramawt. In order to suppress it, Abū Bakr wrote to the governor there, Ziyād ibn Labīd, instructing him to take allegiance from the people and collect zakāh and charities from those people. When Ziyād ibn Labīd went to the tribe of Banū ‘Amr ibn Mu‘āwiyah for collection of zakāh, he took keen fancy for a she-camel of Shayṭān ibn Ḥujr, which was extremely beautiful and powerfully built. He jumped over it and took possession of it. Shayṭān ibn Ḥujr did not agree to surrender it and said to him: “Leave this one and take another she-camel in exchange.” But Ziyād would not agree. Shayṭān sent for his brother ‘Adā’ ibn Ḥujr for his support. On coming, he too had a talk, but Ziyād insisted on his point and did not, by any means, consent to keep off his hand from that she-camel. At last both these brothers appealed to Masrūq ibn Ma’dī Karib for help. Consequently, Masrūq also used his influence so that Ziyād might leave the she-camel, but he refused categorically, whereupon Masrūq enraged, advanced, untied the she-camel, and handed it back to Shayṭān.

On this Ziyād was infuriated. He gathered his men and prepared for battle. On the other side Banū Labīd also assembled to face them, but could not defeat Ziyād and were badly beaten at his hands. Their women were taken captive and property was looted. Eventually, those who had survived were obliged to take refuge under the protection of al-Ash‘ath. al-Ash‘ath promised assistance on the condition that he should be acknowledged ruler of the area. Those people agreed to this condition and his coronation was also formally solemnised. After having his authority acknowledged he arranged an army and set out to fight Ziyād.

Meanwhile, Abū Bakr had written to the governor of Yemen, al-Muhājir ibn Abī Umayyah, to go for the help of Ziyād with a contingent. Al-Muhājir was coming with his contingent when they came face to face. Seeing each other, they drew swords and commenced fighting at az-Zarqān. In the end, al-Ash‘ath fled from the battlefield and, taking his remaining men, closed himself in the fort of an-Nujayr. The enemy was such as to let them alone. They laid siege around the fort.

al-Ash‘ath thought how long could he remain shut up in the fort with this lack of equipment and men, and that he should think out some way of escape. So one night he stealthily came out of the fort and met Ziyād and al-Muhājir, and conspired with them that if they gave asylum to himself and nine members of his family, he

would get the fort gate opened. They accepted this term and asked him to write for them the names of those persons. He wrote down the nine names and handed them over to them, but acting on his traditional wisdom, forgot to write his own name in that list. After settling the agreement, he returned to his people and told them: "I have secured protection for you, so open the gate of the fortress." When the gate was opened, Ziyād's forces pounced upon them. The people protested: "We were promised safety!" Ziyād's soldiers replied: "That's wrong! Al-Ash'ath sought protection only for ten persons of his household, whose names are with us." In short eight hundred persons were put to sword and hands of several women were chopped off. According to the agreement, the nine men were let off, but the case of al-Ash'ath became complicated. Eventually it was decided he should be sent to Abū Bakr and he should decided about him. At last he was sent to Madīnah in chains along with a thousand women prisoners. On the way, relatives and strangers alike, men and women, all hurled curses at him, and the women were calling him traitor. And who could be a greater traitor than one who brings the sword upon his own people? However, when he reached Madīnah, Abū Bakr released him, and on that occasion he was married to Umm Farwah.