

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>A Survey into the Lives of the Infallible Imams</u> > <u>Chapter 3: A Discourse on Imam Zayn al-</u> '<u>Abidin ('a)</u> > <u>The Imam's acts of worship</u> > <u>The Imam's prayers and tear shedding</u>

Chapter 3: A Discourse on Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a)

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) (also known as 'Ali ibn al-Husayn) is described and viewed as the "champion of spirituality" (spirituality in its correct sense). The philosophy behind this character in 'Ali ibn al-Husaynis understood when one looks at the Household of the Prophet (every single one of them) of whom 'Ali ibn al-Husaynis one.

In it, one would see Islamic spirituality, or more specifically, the reality of Islam and how belief in Islam has deeply penetrated the Household of the Prophet (s) which in itself is an issue worthy of consideration. When one sees a man like 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, who was raised by the Prophet, and on whose lap the Prophet rested his head before he breathed his last breath when he submitted his life to the Giver of Life. This is the man who had resided in the house of the Prophet (s) from early childhood.

No man was as close to the Prophet as he was. Yes, when one looks at the life of 'Ali, one sees complete faith in the Prophet and is able to see the Prophet through the being of 'Ali. What caused this absolute faith towards the Prophet in a man like 'Ali?

The Imam's acts of worship

All members of the Prophet's Household are alike in this respect. It is truly amazing. When one observes 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, and the extent of his fear of Allah, or his manner of worship, which can be viewed as true worship, and in the words of Alexis Carl is the journey of the soul to Allah (his manner of worship and prayers were not just the body standing in front of the Ka'bah and the soul wondering elsewhere, it was always as if his soul left his body). Yes, when one observes 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, he is filled with awe by his level of spirituality and the Islam he practiced. What was his type of Islam? What kind of soul was this?

These voices belonged to the king even if they were from the throat of his servant.

When one sees 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, it is as if he has seen the Prophet in the *mihrab* of worship, in the final third of the night in Mount Hira'.

One night when the Imam was occupied with his usual routine of worship, one of his children suffered a fall and broke a bone. This needed a bone setter. The family, however, did not interrupt the Imam's worship. They went and brought the bone setter and wrapped the child's hand, while he was screaming out of pain. The child's pain subsided and the episode ended. The next morning, the Imam noticed the child's bandaged hand and enquired as to what had happened. He was informed of the incident that had taken place the night before while the Imam was consumed in worship. It then became clear that the Imam was in such a state of devotion that his soul had flown towards Allah such that the sound surrounding him in the house had not reached him.

The herald of affection

Zayn al-'Abidin was known as the herald of affection. This is also amazing: whenever he would see an isolated person, a stranger in the city, a pauper, or one who went unnoticed by others, the Imam would be affectionate towards him. He would show them kindness and invite them to his home. One day he saw a group of lepers (people are usually repelled by people who have leprosy due to a misplaced fear of becoming infected, but in the end, they too are servants of Allah). He invited them to his home and tended to them there. Zain al-'Abidin's home was the house of the poor, the orphans and the helpless.

The service in the Hajj caravan

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was the child of the Prophet. On his pilgrimage to *Hajj*, he was reluctant to travel with the caravan who knew him. Instead, he wished to travel with the caravan coming from a remote area who did not recognize him. This was so that he may travel amongst them as a stranger. He joined such a caravan and asked whether he can be of service to them. They accepted. In those days, it was customary for people to travel on camel and horseback taking on average ten to twelve days to reach Mecca.

During this period, the Imam became the servant of the caravan. A certain man who knew the Imam happened to encounter this caravan. As soon as he recognized the Imam, he went to the travellers and asked, "Who is this man whom you have brought to serve you?" They replied, "We do not know.

He is a young man from the city. But he is a very good man." The man replied, "Clearly, you are unaware, because if you knew, you would not place him at your service." They enquired about the Imam's identity to which the man replied, "He is 'Ali ibn al-Husaynibn 'Ali, the grandchild of the Prophet." They ran towards the Imam and dropped themselves at the Imam's feet, "Sir! What was this you have done? We could have been punished by Allah for what we have done! How could we have been so impudent towards you? You must now be our master! Rest here while we serve you! To which the Imam

replied, "No, my experience in travelling within a caravan who knows me, tells me that they will not permit me to serve the people of the caravan. That is why I choose to travel with a caravan whose travellers do not know me so that I may obtain the privilege of being of service to Muslims and friends.

The Imam's prayers and tear shedding

For Imam Zayn al-'Abidin such an opportunity which had been bestowed upon his great father, Imam al-Husayn, was never bestowed upon him. Neither an opportunity the likes of the opportunity Imam al-Sadiq had. However, for someone who wants to be of service to Islam, there are always other opportunities but in different forms. One just has to consider the honor Imam Zayn al-'Abidin has created for the Shi'ah World in the form of prayer! The Imam was able to fulfil his mission in this respect.

Some have assumed that because Imam Zayn al-'Abidin never rose up with the sword during his lifetime and after his father's martyrdom, he allowed his father's legacy to be forgotten. However, this is by no means correct. He would make use of any opportunity to keep his father's legacy alive. Why did he continuously lament and commemorate the tragedy? Was it akin to the condition of a man who feels pitiful and cries indiscriminately? Or rather, did he want to keep the memory of this tragedy alive, in order to remind people not to forget the reasons why Imam al-Husaynrebelled and whom he was murdered by? This was the reason why the Imam constantly shed tears.

One day, one of his servants asked, "Sir! Is it not time you stopped crying?" (He had realized that the Imam was crying for his loved ones.) The Imam replied, "What are you saying? Ya'qub [Jacob] had only one Yusuf [Joseph] and this is how the Qur'an describes his affections,

"And he turned away from them and said: O my sorrow for Yusuf [Joseph]! And his eyes became on account of the grief that he was supressing."1

I saw eighteen Josephs fall onto the ground before my eyes, one after the other." 1

1. Surat Yusuf 12:84.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/survey-lives-infallible-imams-murtadha-mutahhari/chapter-3-discourse-imam-zayn-al-abidin#comment-0