

## Chapter 4: Al-Shahid at Damascus

Al-Shahid Al-Awwal has spent a great portion of his life in Damascus, the fact indicated by the birth of his four sons at Sham which remained a starting point for some of his travels and trips. Hence as Damascus has witnessed the glittering of this giant personality, it has afterwards seen the decline of that glaring sun through bloody events.

Al-Shahid was the greatest Shi'i thinker and Imami Faqih at that juncture in history, whose fame was so widely known that he deserved the epithet 'Shams Al-Din'. His firm liaison and multiple ties with several intellectual and political personages, have actually provided the Shi'i creed a good opportunity for attaining progress, propagation and deep-rootedness.

### [With Sultan Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad](#)

There were intimate links between Al-Shahid Al-Awwal and Ali ibn Mu'ayyad, the last king among the Dynasty of AlSarbidaran, who ruled over Khurasan for half a century. The letters corresponded between them denote Al-Shahid's status officially and popularly, and the extent of love, appraisal and veneration held by the Shi'i governments and all the Shi'ah in general toward him.

Sultan Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad is considered the best among the kings of Al-Sarbidaran Dynasty, as Khurasan witnessed, during his reign, an extensive social and economical advancement. And despite the severity of the Moguls' onslaughts against the Islamic East, he managed to safeguard Khurasan against the wave of death and devastation.

He was known of his affection toward the poor and destitute, beside his sincere striving for making justice and equality prevalent throughout his homeland, with keenness for propagating the Shi'i creed and glorifying Ahl Al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

This fact reflects his permanent seeking the friendship of AlShahid Al-Awwal, as he was occasionally sending him a present to show his loyalty and support. Among his presents, there was a copy of the holy Qur'an, that was later known as Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad's present.

Al-Sultan used to pride himself in Al-Shahid Al-Awwal so highly, that he once proposed to him to come to Khurasan to occupy the vacancy caused by the martyrdom of Al-Shaykh Hasan Juri.

Following is the full text of the letter sent by Al-Sultan, including his suggestion:

*In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful  
Salam (peace) like fragrance of a diffusing ambergris,  
Spreading Musk scent through all places,  
Salam challenging the fullmoon in every house,  
Salam resembling the sun at every rising,  
Upon the truth religion sun, whose shadow is perpetual,  
Upon a felicitous grandfather under a pleasant bliss.*

May Allah the Exalted perpetuate the Majlis (meeting) of the magnanimous master, labouring scholar, the honourable, perfect, ascetic, pious, of noble morals, loyal descent, the world Allamah (erudite), the nations guide, the ideal of firmly learned Ulama, the example of dignitaries and investigators, the sects Mufti, truth distinguisher, possessor of virtues and excellences, owner of superiority among the magnates and dignitaries, inheritor of the knowledge of the prophets and messengers, revivalist of the traditions of the pure Imams, Allah's trustee on earth, our master the sun of cult and religion, may Allah extend the ropes of his shadows to Muhammad and his Household, under a firmly established state, and continuous favour reaching the Resurrection Day.

Then, the desirous lover, is extremely longing for being favoured with meeting him, and be pleased with union after long separation.

*The sight is deprived of your countenance, but,  
The heart is quite quenched from your visage.*

It is to be disclosed to that person who is still a reference for those who have mind that Allah has secured the Shi'ah of Khurasan against both misfortunes, and they are for meeting him, and dipping up from the ocean of his virtues and favours, while the honourable men have been separated by time repercussions, and all or most of them were ripped asunder by vicissitudes of night and day.

Amir Al-Mu'minin, upon him be Allah's peace said: "Death of the Ulama is a crevice in religion." We never see among us anyone being confident of his knowledge in giving verdicts, with whose guidance people may be guided, so they beseech Allah to grace them with his presence, be illuminated by the beam of his light, following his sciences, be led by his lofty illustrations, and be confident of his all-inclusive munificence and abundant grace, that their hope never be disappointed and their supplication never be repelled, but that their chief be succored, and their aspiration be attained. Allah – the Exalted – said:

***"Such as unite that which Allah hath commanded should be joined ..."***

Undoubtedly, the uterine relations are more entitled to the Islamic spiritual uterine bond, and the foremost of relations to be favoured with care are faith and uterine relations, as they both are two bonds that never be disunited by time passage and circumstances, or rather two twigs that cannot be destroyed by the strongest storm.

And we fear Allah's wrath upon this land because of absence of consciousness and guidance, be hopeful for his general favouring and perfect generosity, that he be graceful to shower upon us his attention, relying upon Almighty Allah, without trying to give excuses, God-willing.

It is expected from his kind attributes, and the excellences of his essence, to pardon this slip, and peace be upon followers Islam.

Desirous Lover [1](#)

Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad

This letter was carried by a special envoy, who was AlShaykh Shams Al-Din Muhammad Al-Awi, one of the Shi'ah Ulama and among the intimate friends of Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad. This document, in general, contains numerous indications showing al-Shahid's greatness, sublime status and fame, beside how Al-Sultan Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad was venerating knowledge (Ilm) and Ulama: and how much he showed respect for Al Shahid Al-Awwal.

In fact it is an invitation to Al-Shahid to undertake the religious leadership. When knowing the sensitive role of religion at that crucial period, with its extensive impact on we would realize how sensitive and critical the situation was.

Still it is unknown why Al-Shahid has not positively responded to the proposal, going in seclusion for seven complete days for compiling a perfect Fiqhi collection, that was actually regarded the best compilation ever written on Fiqh during that juncture in history.

Unfortunately, the reply letter with the original copy of AlLum'ah Al-Dimishqiyyah were lost, beside other valuable books, in the wake of the downfall of Al-Sarbidaran Dynasty, and end of the reign of Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad.

## **Al-Sarbidaran Dynasty**

They are Shi'i governments seizing power over Khurasan in 738 H., after bloody battles. Their rule lasted till 783 H., when Khurasan was invaded by Tymour Leng, who killed their last King: Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad.

The revolution of Al-Sarbidaran erupted as a violent reaction against the Moguls' oppression. It was led by their first King the Emir Abd Al-Razzaq, the founder of the dynasty, proclaiming an enthusiastic banner being: "We prefer to die executed than to live in disgrace."[2](#)

As for every revolution there should be a sparkle, Al-Sarbidaran uprising was ignited by an onslaught launched by five Mogul soldiers, at Bashtin Village (belonging to the Town of Bayhaq),<sup>3</sup> against a house provoking its inhabitants.

Thereat the house inhabitants defended themselves, killing the five soldiers, the fact indicating the abolition of entire Bayhaq from over the map. Then Abd Al-Razzaq rose up to protect the revolutionists declaring his support for them, causing the incident to develop and turn to be a strong revolution against the Moguls existence as a whole, proclaiming their resounding outcry: "We prefer to die executed over living in disgrace".<sup>4</sup>

The rulers of Al-Sarbidaran belong, on the paternal side, to Al-Imam al-Husayn (a.s), whereas on the maternal side they descent from the Baramikah (Barmakites).

Al-Shaykh Khalifah Al-Mazandarani is considered the brain of the revolution and founder of its thought keystone. As he was martyred, he was succeeded by his disciple Al-Shaykh Hasan Juri, who was, later on, martyred in his vigour struggle against his foes.

His martyrdom was of an extremely dangerous consequence on the thought arena, leading the last King of Al Sarbidaran, Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad, to offer Al-Shahid Al-Awwal the intellectual leadership, and occupy the place left vacant due to the passing away of Al-Shaykh Hasan Juri.

The significance of Al-Sarbidaran lies in the base in the fact that their uprising was established on an Islamic base, aiming at establishing justice throughout the land, adopting the school of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) as their means toward attaining this objective. Throughout Al-Sarbidaran<sup>5</sup> rule, which lasted about half a century, Khurasan witnessed great advancement in various fields and aspects.

## **His Time Governments**

To explore the political dimension in Al-Shahid Al-Awwal's life, we have to be acquainted with the political circumstances prevalent during his era, through studying the form of the governments, with their influence regions and thought trends, it will be feasible to lay down a plain political map helping to shed light on the political aspect in Al-Shahid's character.

## **Abbasid State Disintegration**

The Abbasid rulers have adopted an extremely harsh, repressive and suppressive policy toward the Alawids and their popular bases represented by the Shi'i movement, reaching its climax during Al-Mutawakkil's reign, as Iraq in particular turned to be an arena for horrific bloody operations.

When taking into consideration the fact that the Alawids and their Shi'ah supporters have played a crucial role in the triumph of the Abbasid rule and the end of the Umayyad rule, we would realize how much they were suffering, feeling regretful due to their absolute backing for the Abbasid movement.

Hence the Shi'ah intended to establish a political entity of their own, by availing themselves of the congenial opportunities, for this purpose. As the decline and weakness factors began to cause the Abbasid State to erode, the independence-seeking movements started to rise and recover throughout many regions of the Islamic State, the foremost of which being Africa, Iran and Andalusia. [6](#)

In 656 H. The Mogul invasion to the Islamic East commenced, causing the collapse of the Islamic towns and metropolises one after the other. The same fate was true for Baghdad, the centre of rule and civilization, at the hands of Moguls headed by Hulako, the grandson of Jingiz Khan.

This was followed by the emergence of numerous Islamic regimes in different parts of the world. The Ayyubi State emerged in 664 H., whose influence expanded during the era of Salab Al-Din Al-Ayyubi, to cover remote area of the Islamic world, ranging from the River of Nile up to Tigris. During his reign, the known crusade war erupted between the Muslims and Christians. The Ayyubi State was widely known of its being sectarian, taking the side of the Sunnah.

After that the Mamalik, who constituted an extension to the Ayyubi State, appeared on the scene, where slaves of various races ruled, all being blood-shedders. Their rule lasted for about three centuries.

The Mamalik are of two sections: The marine Mamalik, who were called with this name in relation to the River of Nile, as their military positions and war barracks were stationed on a small island in the river. They were mostly Turkish and Moguls. The second sections were called Al-Mamalik AlBarjiyyah, who were mostly from among the Sharakisah.

## The Sharakisah

The Sharakisah<sup>7</sup> seized power when the rule of the marine Mamalik came to an end in 784 H. Their reign lasted for about 138 years, taking of Cairo as their capital. Their first king was Al-Zahir Sayf Al-Din, who was called "Barquq", being at the outset of his reign a slave of the upright King Al-Hajji Ibn Al-Ashraf Ibn Sha'ban, the fourteenth king of the Turks.

Al-Hajji came to power when being only ten years old, the weak point that was exploited by Barquq who snatched power from him. But nothing went for his good, as the emirs soon declared their dissent from him. Both Tamrigh Al-Afdali and Baligh AlUmari revolted against him, deposing him from power, rebringing Al-Hajji to power again, while Barquq was imprisoned at Karak.

As soon as Barquq left prison, he retained power again, after mobilizing combatant forces, managing to defeat his enemies, maintaining the rule till his death in 801 H.

## Barquq's Stand Toward the 'Abbasids

The Abbasid Caliph, during the lifetime of Barquq, was Al Mutawakkil Muhammad Ibn Al-Mu'tadid, who had the favour reinforcing Barquq's position in rule. However Barquq never maintained his loyalty toward

Al-Mutawakkil, as he embarked on deposing him from caliphate, throwing him into the prison of Qal'at Al-Jabal, assigning Mubammad Ibn Ibrahim with caliphate, who was later on called Al-Wathiq Bi Allah, maintaining his post till his death in 788 H.

Thereat some of the magnates proposed to re-enchage AlMutawakkil with rulership, but Barquq refused this proposal outright, appointing as a caliph, Al-Wathiq's brother, who was called Al-Musta'im Bi Allah, who remained in power till 791H. Only then the idea of returning Al-Mutawakkil to rulership stroke the mind of Barquq, who set him free, gaining people's allegiance for him as a caliph, deposing Al-Musta'im from his post. This situation persevered on this condition till both the caliphs were dead.

## **Social Conditions during Barquq's Reign**

The social conditions in Egypt and Syria have deteriorated, when the Sharakisah seized power, and corruption prevailed among the State devices. The situation was even exacerbated with the eruption of the crusade wars, when the crusaders' onslaughts started just after the halt of the Mogul invasion. Thereat, the circumstances became even much worse, because of the wars and home seditions.

As within a short time, the power was seized by Barquq, then he was deposed and imprisoned; after that he came to power again. The King AlAshraf was deposed too and brought back to rule, and after him Al-Mutawakkil was removed from the post of caliphate, and returned to it again.

The Islamic nations thus suffered greatly from the rule of the Sharakisah, as after being previously slaves at the hands of brokers, they changed today to be kings and monarchs ruling over and controlling the affairs of a great Ummah. Recklessness reached the climax, to the extent that each slave was infatuated to rule as soon as entering the market.

The Sharakisah's suppression was so intense that created fidget, bitter feeling and sadness among the Islamic nations, beside leading to the eruption of several home rebellions in various regions against their rule.

The situation was farther exacerbated with the occurrence of several natural disasters, that overcame the country, as periods of drought, famine and earthquakes prevailed, beside the spread of dangerous epidemics that took the lives of thousands of people.

Throughout his reign, Barquq was busy repressing the seditions and rebellions, beside foiling the internal conspiracies, and confronting the external threats. He received a very rude letter from Taymour Leng calling him to unconditionally surrender, for which he gave a similar reply, but he was not respited as he died in 801 H.

Externally, the State boundaries were, during his reign, threatened by the crusaders and marine Mamalik's raids. All these threats have led consequently to halt the process of reconstruction and culture reviving, beside paralyzing the movement of trade and agriculture.

In such circumstances, nations had no choice but to endure the repercussions of the war expenditure, as taxes extremely hiked, corruption and immorality found way into administration and government, with essential goods, like sugar and salt, being monopolized by a band of influential people.

In this way, depravity covered all walks of life, with the emergence of phenomena of degradation and immorality, beside the habit of the lads taking concubines (for pleasure), in a way worse than it was common during the era of the 'Abbasids.

Moreover, the sectarianism between the Sunnah and Shi'ah came to light, whereat libertine rulers and malevolent crusaders have played a wicked role in flaring the conflict, for diverting the peoples' attention with the aim of paving the way for implementing their schemes to impose their control and tyranny.

In such heated tensioned political circumstances, Al-Shahid Al-Awwal used to pass his life days, endeavouring to revitalize solidarity and congruity among all strata of the Islamic society, taking Damascus a centre for his cultural and intellectual activities.

## **Damascus**

Al-Shahid has passed the last part of his life in an ancient city, being Damascus, which was then under the dominion of Bidamur, who was apparently representing Barquq's government. But Damascus government had, in fact, no relation to the Egyptian policy but formally, and Bidamur was practising unlimited authorities in administration and rule, without consulting or even informing Barquq.

Despite the sensitivity of the situation, Al-Shahid Al-Awwal managed to make for himself, within Damascus society and Syria in general, a notable social and thought status, finding way into the state organisms, working for directing the authorities toward implementing reform enterprises. For instance, he could persuade the government to level a deathblow to "Yalush", to whom we shall refer later on.

Although the ties between the Shi'ah and Sunnah, Al-Shahid had a reputed position among the Sunni forums, with his house meeting being full of a large number of their Ulama, attending to hold discussion or seeking solutions for Fiqh and Kaliim questions.

Hence Al-Shahid was doing his utmost to mend the fences and reconcile between the Shi'ah and Sunnah, considering all the required reservations not to provoke the other party. He used to hide any Shi'i works in his possession, with abstaining from arguing any issue entailing dispute between the two sects. In this way Al-Shahid was, actually, the real unity pioneer, bearing in mind the upper Islamic interest, sincerely endeavouring for making agreement among Muslims.

## **His Connection with Rulers**

No information being available about Al-Shahid's links with the governments ruling at his time, since we know nothing about his relations with the Abbasid caliph or with Barquq. But it is out-of-the-way that

such a gigantic personality stays out of sight, particularly when being aware of his travels and trips all over the Islamic world, beside his numerous meetings with different personages and leaders in many Islamic metropolises.

His celebrity reached the level leading the Khurasan Governor, Ali Ibn Mu'ayyad, to invite him to undertaking the religious headship at Khurasan. Besides, many letters were corresponded between them, with the king's keenness to occasionally send Al-Shahid a symbolic present indicating his loyalty toward him.

Naturally, such relation cannot come into being out of nothing. But unfortunately, history has never kept for us but a scant of some scholars' letters, which are sufficient to indicate the lofty rank enjoyed by Al-Shahid. They also undoubtedly emphasize the fact that Al-Shahid was actually counted the foremost dignitary in respect of the Islamic Fiqh and culture, at his time.

## Yalush Movement

The era in which Al-Shahid lived was so chaotic, characterized with political and social unstability, with insurrections occurring everywhere. In such circumstances, many sorts of partial thoughts were disseminated, behind which mean personal interests lie.

The sectarian tension has led to the emergence of dangerous movements, infatuating the naive and simple people, exploiting the severe dispute between the Shi'ah and Sunnah as a means for achieving their aspirations and goals. Maybe this was the reason encouraging Al-Shahid to choose Damascus as a place for his residence, since he tried to be in the first line of the front of thought struggle, if it can be said so.

He intended, out of this, to closely control the intellectual and political currents, with intervening in due time to foil the plots aiming at abolishing the agreement among Muslims, and ripping asunder their union.

In such critical conditions, a dangerous movement emerged on scene at Jabal Amil, publicizing for a new school of thought (Madhhab), making use of the gap of disagreement between the Shi'ah and Sunnah, with creating confusion within the Shi'i sect itself

No reliable sources are at hand, that furnish us with information about this movement or their leader, who was called Muhammad Yalush, thought to be one of the disciples learning under Al-Shahid Al-Awwal. Some believe the movement to be following the Sufi creed, depending upon a thought base, which is .believing in the unity of existence.

Through his aptitudes in oratory, jugglery and sorcery, Mubammad Yalush managed to gain for his movement a large number of the simple-minded from among the Shi'ah and Sunnah. Therefore Al-Shahid had to act urgently to frustrate all these perilous moves, that were aimed at demolishing the very

existence of the Ummah. Hence he managed to make the Damascus Government believe in the necessity of uprooting this sedition.

Then the authorities responded to his proposal, mobilizing a military detachment, that proceeded toward Yalush's camp. Then the decisive battle took place at a region close to Nabatiyyah, in which Yalush was soon killed, with his troops being scattered.

But Yalush's movement has never come to an end with killing him, as leadership was shifted to a man called Taqi Al-Din Al-Jabali, and after him to Yusuf Ibn Yahya, who both played an effective role in exterminating Al-Shahid (may Allah be pleased with him).

- [1.](#) Rawdat Al-Jannat, Hayat Al-Imam Al-Shahid.
- [2.](#) The original text of the slogan is in Persian.
- [3.](#) It is presently called Sabzawar.
- [4.](#) The reader can see the great resemblance between the motto of the Sarbidaran and that of Al-Imam Al-Husayn (a.s) at Karbala: "Far from us is abasement." (Translator)
- [5.](#) In Al-Munjid, under the chapter of Al-Alam (heads) it is stated: (Sarbidaran is): An Iranian Dynasty, among whom there are kings who ruled over a vast part of Khurasan. They were called by the Iraqis as "Al-Shuttar", and by the people of Morocco with the name "Al Suqurah". They made of Sabzawar their base, and their greatest king being Masud, who was murdered in 1344 AD. (Translator)
- [6.](#) The Fatimids in Egypt, Idrisis in Morocco, and Buwayhids in Iraq and Iran. (Translator)
- [7.](#) Al-Sharakisah descend in origin from the northwestern regions of the Caucas and the eastern shore of the Black Sea. (Translator)

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