

## Chapter 5: The Reasons for Imam Musa al-Kazim's ('a) Martyrdom

“You are the main means of approach and the right way, you are the martyrs in this mortal world and the Day of Judgement will make equal what was unequal before.”<sup>1</sup>

All of the infallible Imams, except for the holy being of the Imam of the Time who is still alive, died as martyrs. None of them died a natural death or as a result of an illness. This was one of their big glories. Firstly, because they always wished for martyrdom in the path of Allah and we can see the inner sense for this in the supplications they used to read which they have taught us. ‘Ali said, “I would hate to die in bed. I would prefer be killed with one thousand sword strikes than dying peacefully in bed.”

The supplications and *ziyarat* we read during pilgrimage to their resting places remind us of their virtues and that they are among the martyrs. The sentence I referred to at the beginning of speech was from the Jami‘ah *al-Kabirah* supplication in which we read, “You are the straight path and the main means of approach, you are the martyrs in this world and the intercessors of the next world.”

The term “*shahid*” (martyr) is the title for the holy being of Imam al-Husayn who is usually referred to as *Shahid*, “Al-Husayn al-Shahid” (the Martyred Husayn); just as we call Imam al-Sadiq “Ja‘far al-Sadiq” (the Truthful Ja‘far); and Imam ibn Ja‘far, “Musa al-Kazim” (the one who is dominant over his anger). This, however, does not mean that Imam al-Husayn is the only martyred Imam among the infallible Imams. Just as calling Musa ibn Ja‘far, al-Kazim, would not mean the rest of the Imams were not al-Kazim (dominant over their anger); addressing Imam al-Rida, as al-Rida does not mean that this is not applicable to the rest of Imams or if we say Imam al-Sadiq it does not mean that the rest of the Imams were not [God-forbid] truthful.

### [The influence of time on the type of combat](#)

Now the question put forward is: why did the rest of the infallible Imams become martyrs? Even those Imams whose history does not confirm them to uprising against tyrant rulers of their time, or the ones

whose apparent conduct demonstrated that their methods differed to those of Imam al-Husayn)?

All right! Imam al-Husayn was martyred; however, why is it claimed that Imam al-Hassan, Imam al-Sajjad, Imam al-Kazim, Imam al-Sadiq (as well as all the other Imams) should have also been martyrs? The answer to this is as follows: it is incorrect for us to assume that the methods and objectives of the rest of the Imams were different to Imam al-Husayn in this regard. Some have this presumption and claim: among the Imams, Imam al-Husayn's decision was to fight against the tyrannical system of his time.

However, the rest of the Imams did not fight. If this is our assumption, then we are mistaken. History informs us of the opposite and all the evidence and explanations are contrary to such a conclusion. If we look at this issue from a different point of view, with correct understanding of the evidence, then we will find that it is impossible for a true Muslim to actually come into terms with a tyrant and oppressive systems of his time, let alone someone in the holy position of an *imam*. On the contrary, he would fight them, the only difference being the forms of their combat.

At one time, the fight may be visible, declaring a war and fighting with weapons. This is one form of combat. At other times, there is fighting, by means of condemnation of the other side, as well as discouraging people from his side, revoking the other side and inclining the society against him but not in the form of drawing weapons.

This is how time requirements can influence the form of combat. Time requirement can never be effective in a situation where in one case agreeing to peace with oppressors is permissible in one situation and forbidden in another situation. No, coming to terms with oppressors is never permitted at any time or place. The form of combat, however, may vary. It can be overt or covert.

The history of the infallible Imams generally demonstrates their constant battle against oppression. If they speak of fighting while in dissimulation [*taqiyyah*], it does not mean stagnancy and idleness. The root of *taqiyyah* is from *waqy*, just like *taqwa*, the root of which is from *waqy*. This is what *taqiyyah* means: defending oneself undercover or metaphorically speaking, using a shield to defend oneself during battle to get hit less but in no way withdrawing. This is why we see that all the infallible Imams have the honor—yes the honor—of not coming to terms with any tyrant caliph and were continuously hostile with them.

Today, after one thousand and three hundred years (more for some Imams and slightly less for some others) you see caliphs like 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (from before his time and during his time; the children of 'Abd al-Malik, the cousins of 'Abd al-Malik, Bani al-'Abbas, Mansur Dawaniqi, Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah, Harun al-Rashid, Ma'mun, and Mutawakkil) are among the most ill-reputed people in history.

Among us and even among the Sunnis, it is clear that they were bespattered. Who bespattered them? If it were not for the resistance of the infallible Imams who revealed their depravities and debaucheries and other people like them, we would consider Harun and especially Ma'mun on the same rank as saints. If

the infallible Imams had not revealed Ma'mun's inner intentions and had not fully introduced him, he would have definitely been regarded as one of the greatest heroes in religion and science in this world.

Our topic of discussion is about the martyrdom of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far. Why did they martyr him? First of all, the fact that Imam Musa ibn Ja'far was martyred has been made certain and no one can deny it. According to the most famous and most valid narrations, Musa ibn Ja'far spent four years in the corner of prison dungeons and passed away there. There are historical texts about the time the Imam spent in prison; suggestions were constantly forwarded to the Imam demanding for apology or even a verbal confession from him, but the Imam never agreed.

## [The Imam in Basrah Prison](#)

The Imam served time not only in one prison, but in several prisons. They kept on transferring him from one prison to another and this was done, interestingly, because any prison they took the Imam to, it would not take long for the prisoners there to become devoted to him. At first the Imam was taken to Basrah Prison. The Imam was handed over to the governor of Basrah, who at that time was 'Isa ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Ja'far Mansur, the grandchild of Mansur Dawaniqi. 'Isa ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Ja'far Mansur was a violent man who did not take interest in moral issues. As one of his relative says, "They took this pious and holy man to a place where he heard things, he never had heard before."

The Imam was taken to Basrah Prison in the Arabic month of Dhu al-Hijjah, of the year 178 AH, which was supposed to be a time of celebration and happiness due to *'Id al-Duha*.

The Imam spent a period of time in Basrah Prison after which even this very 'Isa had gradually become fond of the Imam. He too, at first, truly imagined the Imam to be what the government had broadcasted of him, which was a rebellious man whose only skill was 'to claim to be the rightful successor'. In other words, the desire to become a leader had made him crazy. Upon his personal acquaintance with the Imam, he realized that the Imam was a spiritual man, whose only purpose of raising the issue of successoral was to address its spiritual aspects. The situation then changed. He ordered a very good room to be put at the Imam's disposal and entertained the Imam publicly.

Harun sent a secret message, in which he ordered 'Isa to get rid of him. 'Isa responded, "I will not do such a thing." Finally, 'Isa wrote a letter to the Caliph,

"Order them to come and take him back; otherwise, I will set him free myself. I cannot keep such a man as a prisoner."

Since he was the Caliph's cousin and the grandchild of Mansur, his words were, of course, observed.

## The Imam in various prisons

They took the Imam to Baghdad and handed him over to Fadl ibn Rabi'. Fadl ibn Rabi' was the son of Rabi', the chamberlain.<sup>2</sup> Harun vested Imam to him.

After a while, he also became fond of the Imam, changed the Imam's conditions and placed the Imam in a better prison. The spies informed Harun that the Imam was not having a difficult time in Fadl ibn Rabi's prison. They informed him that the Imam was not actually a prisoner but actually a guest. Harun took the Imam away from him and handed him over to Fadl ibn Yahya Barmaki.

After a while, Fadl also started treating the Imam that way which this really frustrated Harun. He sent his spies to investigate. They found out that the story was true. He finally took the Imam away and Fadl was disfavoured by Harun. In one of Harun's gathering, Fadl's father (an Iranian minister who was hostile towards the Shi'ahs), to stop his child from being lowered in esteem by Harun, said in Harun's ear,

"If my son has done something wrong, I am prepared to follow any orders you may have. My son has repented, my son this and my son that..."

Afterwards, he came to Baghdad and took the Imam away from his son and handed him over to someone else called Sindi ibn Shahik who they say was not a Muslim. The Imam went through a lot of difficulties in his prison; that is to say the Imam was not left in peace in his prison.

## Harun's request from the Imam

During the last few days of the Imam's imprisonment, which was not more than one week before his martyrdom, Harun sent this very Yahya Barmaki to the Imam and through him, in nice and soft tone, he told the Imam,

"Send my regards to my cousin and tell him it has been proven to us you have committed no sin and are blameless. However, I have unfortunately made an oath and cannot break my word. I have made an oath not to free you before you have confessed to sinning and asked me for forgiveness. No one needs to know. It is enough if you confess in the presence of Yahya. I do not need to be there either; the presence of others is not also needed. I do not want to break my oath. You only need to confess in Yahya's presence and say I am sorry that I have breached and I want the Caliph to forgive me. I will then set you free. Then, you can come to me and etc."

Now look at his resistive spirit! Why are they referred to as the intercessors of the transient realm [*barzakh*]? Why did they become martyrs? They become martyrs in the way of their true faith and belief. They wanted to show that true faith does not allow taking steps with the oppressor. The Imam's response to Yahya Barmaki was, "Tell Harun that there is not much left of my life and that is it." And, after a week, the Imam was poisoned.

## The reasons for the Imam's arrest

Now why did Harun order for the Imam's arrest? Because he was jealous of the Imam's position and felt threatened by it even though the Imam was not revolting against him, nor has he taken the smallest steps to form a revolution (a discernible revolution). Harun, however, had realized that they had started a spiritual revolution of beliefs. When Harun decided to consolidate his son Amin for the position of crown prince, followed by Ma'mun who would subsequently be followed by his son Mu'tamid, he invites the scholars and the prominent figures of all the cities to come to Mecca that year. He organizes a massive convention and takes oaths of allegiance from everyone.

Who in his opinion could have been a potential obstacle for this task? Who is the one in whose presence looks would be directed upon him and would cause others to think that he would be the one worthy of the position of the caliphate? Musa ibn Ja'far.

When Harun comes to Medina, he orders for the Imam's arrest. This very Yahya Barmaki is reported to have said, "During today or tomorrow, I think the Caliph will order the arrest of Musa ibn Ja'far." They asked him, "How come?" He replied, "I accompanied him in his pilgrimage of the Prophet in Masjid al-Nabi.<sup>3</sup> When he wanted to say salutation to the Prophet, I saw him say, 'Peace is upon you, O son of my uncle! O the Messenger of Allah!'" Then, he said, "I am very sorry that I have to arrest your son Musa ibn Ja'far (as if he can lie to the Prophet) this is what is deemed advisable. If I do not do this, there will be upheaval in the land. To stop this and, for the interest of this land, I have to do such a thing. O the Messenger of Allah, I am apologizing."

Yahya told his friend, "I imagine, today or tomorrow, he is going to order the Imam's arrest."

Harun ordered his men to go after the Imam. It just so happened that the Imam was not at home. Where was he? He was at the Prophet's Mosque. The Imam was praying when they entered. They did not permit him to finish his prayers and dragged him out of the Prophet's Mosque. The Imam looked at the Prophet's grave and said, "Do you see how your nation is treating your children?"

Why does Harun do this? This was because he wants to take oaths of allegiance for his children as future crown princes. But, the Imam had not rioted. He had not rioted but his situation was basically a different one. His situation is explained by the fact that Harun and his children were trying to usurp the caliphate.

## Ma'mun's saying

Ma'mun's actions caused some historian to consider him a Shi'ah. In my opinion, there is nothing holding someone back from believing in something but acting against it. He was a Shi'ah and he was one of the Shi'ah scholars. This man had some debates with Sunni scholars that have been recorded in historical texts.

A couple of years ago, a Turkish Sunni judge wrote a book which was translated into Farsi and it was called, “*Descriptions and Trials about Muhammad’s Family*”. Ma’mun’s discussion about ‘Ali’s immediate caliphate is quoted in the above-mentioned book. This discussion is so interesting and scholarly, the form of which is rarely seen to have taken place by any Shi’ah scholar.

It has been written that once Ma’mun himself said, “Can any of you imagine who taught me Shi’ism?” They said, “Who?” He said, “My father.” They replied, “But your father was the worse enemy of Shi’ism and the Shi’ah Imams.” He said, “This is the story. We were on a pilgrimage to *Hajj* with my father. I was very young. Everybody, especially the elders and noblemen, came to visit. He had everyone introduce themselves: say his name, his father’s name and his ancestor up to his great ancestors. This was so that the Caliph could get to know him and see whether he was from Quraysh or not and if he was from the Helpers [*ansar*] of the Prophet, whether he was a Khazraji or an Awsi. Whoever came, the chamberlain would come and say to Harun, ‘This certain person with this name and this father’s name and etc... had come.’ One day the chamberlain came and said, ‘The one who is here to visit the Caliph said, ‘Tell him Musa ibn Ja’far ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib is here.’ As soon as he said this, my father got up and said, ‘Tell him to come in.’ He then said, ‘Tell him to come in on horseback and not get off.’ He ordered us to go and welcome him. We went and saw a man on whose face traces of piety and worship were clearly visible. He appeared to be from among the first class worshippers and a person of great piety. My father shouted from a distance, ‘Please come in mounted for so and so’s sake.’ Then, he very politely seated him higher than himself and started to ask him questions, ‘How many are your dependents?’ ‘It was discovered that he had lots of dependents.’ ‘How are your living conditions?’ ‘My life’s situation is so and so.’ ‘What is your income?’ ‘My income is this much.’ He then left. When he was leaving, my father told us to go, accompany him and see him off. To Harun’s command, we escorted him to the door. That was when he quietly told me, ‘You will become the caliph. I will give you only one advice that is not to treat my children badly.’

We did not know who he was. We returned. I was the most inquisitive from amongst the rest of my siblings so when the place got empty, I asked my father who the man was to whom he paid so much respect. He smiled and said, ‘Frankly, this seat that we are sitting on belongs to them.’ I asked, ‘Do you really believe this?’ He said, ‘I do.’ I said, ‘Why then don’t you give it to them?’ He replied, ‘Do you not know that kingdom is sterile? If I come to know that even you, my son, ever had the idea of becoming my adversary, I will take off your body that which carries your eyes.’

This passed. Harun was giving recompense. He would send exorbitant amounts of money to this and that person’s house. This ranged from four thousand red gold *dinars* to five thousand and so on. We thought the sum he would send the man he paid so much respect to would probably be very high. It was, however, the least; two hundred *dinars*. Again, I went and asked my father about this, he replied, ‘Do you not know that they are our rivals? Politics demands that they always be in need of financial aid and short of money. This is because if their economical facilities ever improve, it is possible that one thousand swords will rise against your father’.”

## The Imam's spiritual influence

You can imagine how much spiritual influence the Shi'ah Imams had. They neither had swords nor propagandized, but they had hearts. There were the Shi'ahs present among Harun's closest allies in his government.

Truth and reality has a kind of attraction that one cannot neglect. Tonight you read in the papers that Malik al-Husaynsaid, "I found out that even my driver was with the partisans."

My chef was also one of them. 'Ali ibn Yaqtin is Harun's minister. He is the second person in the land but a Shi'ah and undercover. He is aiding Musa ibn Ja'far's aims but his guise is for Harun. He reported to the Imam two or three times but Musa ibn Ja'far, who because of his special perception realized the dangers he could be facing, gave him instructions which saved his life. There were some people among Harun's system who were very fond of the Imam and were limitlessly enamoured by him but never dared to contact the Imam.

One of the Ahwazi Iranian Shi'ahs has said, "I had become subject to some very heavy taxes which were put down for me. If I wanted to pay those taxes they had made up for me, my life would crash down. By chance the governor of Ahwaz was deposed and a new governor replaced him. I was really worried that he would ask me for those taxes.

A friend, however, advised me to discuss the issue with him because both the governor and I were Shi'ahs but I never dared to go to him and say that I am a Shi'ah because I could not believe it myself. I said to myself that it would be better if I went to Imam Musa ibn Ja'far in Medina. If he confirmed that the governor is Shi'ah, then I will ask him for advice. I went to the Imam and he wrote a letter which was not longer than three or four sentences; three to four imperious sentences, the type an *imam* would write to his follower. They were about helping to resolve the problems of a Muslim believer who was in need, and something about the position a believer holds with God and that was it.

I secretly brought the letter with me to Ahwaz. I realized that I should give this letter to the governor confidentially. One night, I went to his door. His door-keeper came and I said, 'Tell him someone has come from Musa ibn Ja'far and has a letter for you.' I saw him coming; he greeted me and said, 'What are you saying?' I said, 'I have come from Imam Musa ibn Ja'far and have brought a letter.' He took the letter from me.

He recognized the letter and kissed it. He then kissed my face and my eyes. He immediately took me inside the house and sat in front of me like a child and said, 'You went to the Imam?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'What is the problem that you are facing?' I replied, 'They have put down very heavy taxes for me. If I pay them, my life will be in ruins.' He ordered for the book to be brought on the same night and corrected it.' Because the Imam had written, 'If any one makes a faithful person happy, such and such...', he said, 'Will you let me do you another service?' I replied, 'Yes.' He said, 'I want to halve

whatever I own with you tonight. I will halve all the money I have with you and will ask the price of whatever goods I own. Accept this from me.' The Ahwazi says, 'I came out in that condition and in a trip I later had to Medina I told the story to the Imam.' The Imam smiled and was contented."

What was Harun afraid of? He was afraid of the attraction towards the truth. "Language is not the only tool for propagation."<sup>4</sup> Language has little influence on propagation. True propaganda is through actions. Whoever confronted Musa ibn Ja'far, his generous father or his pure children and spent time with them, he would basically see the reality within them. He would see that they know Allah deeply and truly fear Him. They truthfully love Allah and whatever they did was truly for Him.

## Two common customs among the Imams

Two customs were visible among the Imams. One was worship, fear of Allah and their monotheism. There is a very amazing monotheism in their being. They are weeping and shivering in fear of Allah as if they can see Allah, the Resurrection Day, Hell and Paradise. We read about Musa ibn Ja'far, "The allied party of long prostrations and effervescence tears! One will not cry before he has a disturbed fiery inside."<sup>5</sup>

The second custom observed among the children of 'Ali (the infallible Imams) was their sympathy for and intimacy with the weak, oppressed, dispossessed and needy. Man basically values these differently. By studying the history of Imam al-Hassan, Imam al-Husayn, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, Imam al-Baqir, Imam al-Sadiq, Imam al-Kazim and other subsequent Imams, we see that being attentive to the condition of the needy was basically part of their routine. It was in the form of personal tending and not only ordering for it to be done. They never passed this sort of responsibility to someone else. It is obvious that people perceived these issues.

## The plot of Harun's system

During the time the Imam spent in prison, Harun's system plotted to maybe lower the Imam's reputation. They assigned a very beautiful young woman to become the so-called slave girl of the Imam in prison. In prison, someone obviously has to bring food and if the prisoner is in need of something, he can ask that person. They assigned a very beautiful young slave girl for this task and said, "No matter what kind of a man he is, he has been in prison for a long time, he may at least look at her which makes it possible to accuse him and a group of prattlers can say, 'How could this be possible, a man and a young woman alone in an empty room?'"

They were suddenly informed that a dramatic change had occurred in this young slave girl and that even she had started worshipping. They saw that this slave girl had become another follower of the Imam.<sup>6</sup> They saw her completely disturbed. She was in a different mental state. She kept looking at the sky and at the earth. They said to her, "What is the matter?" She replied, "When I saw this man, I understood what I am and realized that I have committed a lot of sins in my life. I have committed many faults. I

think, I should now only stay in a state of repentance.” She did not change her mind until she died.

## **Bishr Hafi and Imam al-Kazim (‘a)**

You have heard the story of Bishr Hafi.<sup>7</sup> One day the Imam was passing through the alleys of Baghdad and sounds of howl, tar and tambourine could be heard from a house. They were playing and dancing and one could hear the sound of gambling.

Incidentally, one of the servants of the house came out to empty the trash for them to be taken by the rubbish men. The Imam told him, “Does this house belong to a freeman or a slave?” This was a strange question. The servant said, “Can you not realize for yourself from the luxurious state of the house? This is Bishr’s house, one of the authorities, one of the aristocrats; of course, he is free.” The Imam replied, “Yes,<sup>8</sup> it must belong to a freeman. If he was enslaved, all these noises would not be coming out of his house.”

Now whatever else was said is not written. They have only written that other comments were exchanged between them when Bishr realized that the slave who went to empty the rubbish outside had taken longer than he needed to. He came after him and said, “What took you so long?” The slave replied, “A man was talking to me. He asked a very strange question.” Bishr said, “What did he ask?” He said, “He asked me whether the owner of this house was free or enslaved?” I replied, “Of course, he is free.” He then said, “Yes, he is free, if he was a slave, such noises would not have come out.” Bishr said, “What did he look like?” When the servant described him, he realized that it was Musa ibn Ja’far. He asked, “Where did he go?” He said, “He went this way.” Bishr was bare-footed and did not take the time to put his shoes on in fear that he may not find the Imam. He ran out barefoot. He ran and threw himself on the Imam’s lap and asked, “What did you say?” The Imam replied, “This is what I said.” He said, “Sir! From this very hour, I want to be Allah’s slave;” and he meant it. From that moment onwards, he was Allah’s slave.

This news reached Harun. This was why he felt threatened and said, “They just should not be. Basically, your presence (Imam al-Kazim) is a sin in my view.” The Imam asked, “What have I done? What uprising have I caused? What actions have I performed?” These questions had no reply but were saying in an adequate expression, “Basically, your presence is a sin.” At the same time, the Imams never failed to enlighten their followers and other people. They told and conveyed the story to them and they understood what was happening.

## **Safwan Jammal and Harun**

You have probably also heard the story of Safwan Jammal. Safwan owned what the today call, ‘transportation rental services’ which was an agency that rented out camels in those days. He was very reputable and his services were so abundant that the government would frequently ask him for transportation services.

One day, Harun wanted to go on a trip to Mecca and requested his services. He signed a contract with him for renting the transportation. Safwan, however, was one of the followers and companions of Imam al-Kazim.

One day he came to visit the Imam and said (or the Imam may have been informed previously): I have done such a thing. The Imam said, "Why did you offer your camels to such a tyrant man?" He replied, "I did not offer them out for a sinful trip! His trip was a pilgrimage to *Hajj* and a trip of obedience; that is why I loaned them; otherwise, I would not have." The Imam asked, "Have you received your money yet? Or at least, is there any rent to be paid still?" He replied, "Yes, there is." The Imam said, "Refer to you heart, now that you rented your camels out to Harun, do you not wish, deep down in your heart, that Harun stays alive at least until he comes back and pays the rest of your rent?" He said, "Yes." The Imam said, "It is enough that you are contented with the survival of the oppressor and this itself is a sin."

Safwan came out. Harun's men were suddenly informed that Safwan had sold out all his camels. He basically left this job. When he sold them, he went to the other party of the contract and said, "We shall terminate this contract because I no longer want this job," and tried to bring some excuses. Harun was informed and said, "Bring him here." When they brought him, Harun asked, "What is going on?" He replied, "I have grown old. I can no longer do this job. I thought even if I want to work, it can be something else." Harun realized and said, "Tell me the truth! Why did you sell your camels?" Safwan replied, "That was the truth." Harun said, "No, I know what the story is. Musa ibn Ja'far was informed you loaned your camels to me and he told you that this transgressed the law. Do not deny it. I swear to God, had it not been for the long years of acquaintance we have had with your family, I would have ordered your execution right here."

So, these are what caused the martyrdom of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far. Firstly, his presence was, in a way, what caused the caliphs to feel threatened. Secondly, they were publicizing against the caliphs and telling the stories of their oppression. They, however, dissimulated, which means they acted in a way that no evidence was left available for their opposition.

The conditions of their time demanded for them to do their jobs undercover and try not to leave any evidence behind for the other party or at least the least possible. Thirdly, they had an amazingly resistive spirit. As I said before, when they say, "Sir! You just become a little apologetic in the presence of Yahya," and he replies, "My life is ending." In another time, Harun sent somebody to prison and wanted him to get the Imam's confession, and repeated the same things, "We are very fond of you; we are devoted to you. It is to the best interest that you do not go to Medina; otherwise, we do not intend to keep you imprisoned.

We have ordered them to keep you in a safe place near my self. I sent you my special chef, as you may not be used to our foods, to prepare for you whatever you desire." Who was this agent? It was Fadl ibn Rabi' in whose prison the Imam once was and he was one of Harun's high ranking officers. He went to see the Imam in prison while he was wearing his official uniform and he was armed. The Imam realized

that Fadl ibn Rabi' had come (now observe the soul power): Fadl is standing waiting for the Imam to finish his prayer so he could communicate the Caliph's message.

As soon as the Imam said the prayer salutations [*salams*] and he said, *assalamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh*, he gave no chance and said *Allah-u Akbar* and stood up to pray. Again *Fadh*l waited. The *Imam's* prayer finished again and as soon as he said, *assalamu 'alaykum*, the Imam again gave him no chance to begin and said, "*Allah-u Akbar.*" This was repeated a couple of times. Fadl realized that this was being done deliberately. He thought at first the Imam has some prayers in which he has to read four, six, eight *rak'ah's* one after the other.

Afterwards, he found out that this was being done because the Imam had no desire to pay any attention to him. He did not want to accept him. He eventually figured out that he has to fulfil his mission and if he stays for long, Harun would become suspicious of him. This time he started talking before the Imam began to say his *salams*. He may have said *salam* first.

He said whatever Harun had said. Harun had also told him, "Don't go there and say this is what Commander of the Faithful [Amir al-Mu'minin] has said; don't use the term, 'Amir al-Mu'minin'. Say this is what your cousin has said." He said in the utmost courtesy and politeness, "Your cousin has said that it is proven for us that you have committed no faults and sins but it is to the best interest you stay in this place and not go to Medina. I have ordered a special chef for the time being to come, order whatever food you desire so he prepares it for you." They have written that the Imam's response to this was, [*Allahu Akbar*],

"My own wealth is not here. If I want to spend, I will spend from my own licit wealth. The chef is coming so I give orders? I am not a kind of person to ask, 'How much my ratio is or give my portion for this month.' I am not also a man who begs." As soon as he finished speaking, he said *Allahu Akbar* and stood for prayers.

This is how the caliphs realized that they can in no way force them to surrender and become obedient followers. Otherwise, the caliphs themselves knew how costly martyring the Imams would be for them. Their tyrannical policies, however, did not allow them to avoid this. They considered this the easiest way.

## **The manner of the Imam's martyrdom**

As I said before, the last prison the Imam was kept in was the Prison of Sindi bin Shahik who, I have read, was basically a non-Muslim man. He was one of those people who would vehemently put into action whatever was commanded to him. They placed the Imam in a dungeon and then tried to publicize to everyone that the Imam had died a natural death. They have written that, "In order to exonerate his son Fadl, this very Yahya Barmaki promised Harun to carry out the duties others did not carry out." He saw Sindi and said, "You do this job (the job of martyring the Imam)." When he accepted Yahya prepared a very dangerous poison and handed it over to Sindi. In there they had prepared poisonous

dates which were fed to the Imam and then they immediately summoned witnesses.

They invited the city scholars and Judges (they have written that they invited the faithful men who were considered as honorable, pious and trusted by people). In that meeting they called the Imam as well as Harun and said, “O people! Have you heard what rumours these Shi‘ahs are spreading about Musa ibn Ja‘far? They say: ‘He is not comfortable in prison and Musa ibn Ja‘far this and that...’ See for yourselves that he is completely healthy.”

As soon as he finished, the Imam said, “He is lying! Right now I have been poisoned and not more than two or three days is left of my life.”

This time they missed their target. Then after the Imam’s martyrdom, they took his body next to Baghdad’s bridge and kept taking people there and saying, “See, the master is unharmed, none of his bones are broken, his head is not cut either, his throat is not black. We did not kill the Imam, he died a natural death.” They kept the Imam’s body next to Baghdad’s bridge for three days to make people believe that the Imam died of natural causes. The Imam, of course, had many devotees, but the group who reacted like wild rue seeds on fire were the Shi‘ahs.

There is a very touching story which has been written, “Once a group of the Imam’s followers came from Iran with a lot of hardship, they were used to these difficult journeys during those days. When they succeeded to come to Baghdad, they really wished, at least, to visit this prisoner. Visiting a prisoner should not be considered a crime but they were given no permission whatsoever to visit him. They said to themselves, ‘We will beg them, they may accept.’ They came and begged. As it happened, they accepted and said, ‘All right! We will arrange it today. You wait here.’ These desperate people were assured that they will visit their Master and then return to their city and say, ‘We had the good fortune of visiting the Master. We visited him and asked so and so questions from him and this is how he answered it.’ While they were waiting outside the prison to see when they will be given the permission to visit, they suddenly saw four porters carrying a body out on their shoulders. The officer said, ‘This is your Imam’.”

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[1.](#) Ziyarat Jami‘ah al-Kabirah.

[2.](#) The ‘Abbasid caliphs had a chamberlain called Rabi‘, who was the chamberlain for Mansur first. After Mansur, he stayed in their system and his son was in Harun’s system. They were the special people in the imperial court of the so-called ‘Abbasid caliphs and were extremely trustworthy.

[3.](#) 1. These shamefuls truly believed in their heart. Do not think that these people had not beliefs. If they had no beliefs, they would not have been as wretched as they were with beliefs like the assassin group of Imam al-Husayn. When the Imam Asked, “How are the people of Kufah?” Farazdaq and a couple of others said, “Their hearts are with you. In their hearts, they believe in you, but at the same time, they fight against their heart, they have risen against their faith and belief and that has caused them to draw their swords on you. Woe the state of man when materialistic goals and ambition force him to fight against his belief. If they truly did not believe in Islam, if they did had no belief in the Prophet and no belief in Musa ibn Ja‘far and had some other beliefs, they would not have been scolded as much and were not as wretched and under suffer by Allah, but they had beliefs and acted against their beliefs.”

[4.](#) Usul al-Kafi, Section on the Truth [bab al-sidq] and Section on Scrupulousness [bab al-wara‘]

5. Muntahi al-Amal, vol. 2, p. 222.

6. Because the Imam was in prison and had nothing to do, the only thing he could do over there was to worship. Such unendurable worship that is not possible for man to carry out unless he has an extreme love.

7. The pure Imams implement power as such, that is to say it happened naturally and it was not as if they wanted to act.

8. Meaning if he was the servant of Allah.

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