

Chapter 6: Impressions of His Character

The Muslims have agreed that Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, was great and meritorious, and that he was a unique being in this world. None matched him in outstanding qualities, knowledge, and piety. So the Muslims sought blessing through kissing the Imam’s hands and putting them on their eyes.¹ Glorifying the Imam was not confined to those who accompanied and met him, rather it included all historians, regardless of their different inclinations and desires.

They wrote with admiration about his conduct and gave him all noble nick-names and holy qualities. I (the author) think that all those who read about the Imam’s characteristics will admire him, for there is no one similar to him in good inclinations and great qualities. He exists in the mind of all those noble people who adopt ideals and respect their humanity. Now, we will mention the impressions of his contemporaries and of the historians about his character.

The Views of his Contemporaries

The religious scholars and all other figures who were contemporary to the Imam stated their impressions of his character. They all glorified and admired him, whether they showed love toward him or harbored malice against him. The following are their thoughts about him:

1. Jabir al-Ansari

Jabir b. ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari, the great companion of the Prophet, devoted himself to the members of the House, peace be on them, and was among their followers. He expressed his great admiration of the Imam, peace be on him, saying: “None of the children of the prophets was like ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.²”

Indeed none of the children of the prophets was more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn in devotion, piety, and intense turning to Allah in repentance, and none of them was more liable to ordeals and misfortunes than him.

2. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbas

‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbas, despite his eminence among the people and his old age, respected Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin and bowed to him in submission and glory. When he saw him, he stood up to glorify him and said at the top of his voice: “Welcome dear and beloved one!3”

3. Al-Zuhri

Muhammad b. Muslim al-Qarashi, al-Zuhri, was a jurist, one of the leading Imams and religious scholar of Syria and Saudi Arabia.4 He was among those who were sincere to the Imam and loved him very much. He said a group of valuable words in which he expressed the noble qualities and the great ideals of the Imam, peace be on him. The following are some of his words:

“I have never seen a Hashimi like ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.5”

“I have never seen a Qarashi more pious and more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.6”

“I have never seen a Qarashi more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.7”

“I have never met in Medina a person more meritorious than him.8”

“I have never met among the members of the House a person more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.9”

“I sat with ‘Ali b. al-Husayn many times. I have never seen a person more knowledgeable than him in jurisprudence.10”

“‘Ali b. al-Husayn was the most meritorious of the people of his time and the best of them in obedience.11”

“A caller will call out on the Day of Judgment: Let the Lord of the worshippers of his time stand up, so ‘Ali b. al-Husayn will stand up.12” He meant the famous prophetic tradition: “When the Day of Judgment takes place, a caller will call out from inside the Throne: Let the Lord of the worshippers stand up, so he will stand up.13”

Al-Zuhri was asked about the most ascetic one of all the people in the world and he replied: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn.14”

Sufyan b. ‘Ayyina said: “I asked al-Zuhri: Have you met ‘Ali b. al-Husayn? ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I have met him. I have never met a person more meritorious than him. By Allah, I have never known that he had a friend in secret or an enemy in public.’ I asked him: ‘Why was that?’ He answered: ‘Because all those who loved him envied him out of their abundant knowledge of his outstanding merits, and all those who hated him took care of him because he took great care of them.’15”

It is certain that al-Zuhri said these words concerning the Imam because there was a close relationship between the former and the latter. Al-Zuhri had perfect knowledge of the Imam's ideals and noble values. He admired him to the extent that he wept and said: "Ali b. al-Husayn! [16](#)"

4. Sa'id bin al-Musayyab

Sa'id bin al-Musayyab was among the prominent jurists in Medina. The narrators said: "None of the next generation was more knowledgeable than Sa'id. [17](#)" He made friends with Imam Zayn al-'Abidin and knew of his piety and his firm devotion to religion. He admired the Imam, so he said the following words concerning him:

"I have never seen a person more pious than him, namely 'Ali b. al-Husayn. [18](#)"

"I have never seen a person more meritorious than 'Ali b. al-Husayn. When I saw him, I hated myself. I never saw him laugh. [19](#)"

A person said to Sa'id: "I have never seen a person more pious than so-and-so." Sa'id asked him: "Have you seen 'Ali b. al-Husayn?" "No," replied the person. "You have never seen a person more pious than him, [20](#)" explained Sa'id.

Sa'id was sitting and there was a young man from Quraysh beside him. When Imam Zayn al-'Abidin appeared, the Qarashi asked Sa'id about him, and Sa'id replied: "That is the Lord of worshippers, 'Ali b. al-Husayn. [21](#)"

"I have never seen a person gentler and more pious than Zayn al-'Abidin, 'Ali b. al-Husayn. [22](#)"

These words, which this jurist said, have included some of the Imam's qualities such as piety, obedience to Allah, and gentle conduct toward the people.

5. Zayd bin Aslam

Zayd bin Aslam was among the leading jurists of Medina as well as he was among the interpreters of the Holy Qur'an. [23](#) He devoted himself to Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him. He admired the Imam's outstanding qualities such as, piety, Allah-fearingness, ideals, and values. He said many words concerning him. The following are some of them:

"There is no one among the people of the Qibla like him, namely like 'Ali b. al-Husayn. [24](#)"

"I have never seen a person like 'Ali b. al-Husayn among them, namely among the members of the House. [25](#)"

"I have never seen a person better than 'Ali b. al-Husayn in understanding and memorizing (the Qur'an). [26](#)"

This means that the Imam was the best Muslim and the best Hashimi of his time and that Sa'id b. al-Musayyab had never seen a person better than him in understanding and memorizing (the Qur'an). Hence, the Shi'ites emphasize that the Imam should be the best of his time in merits and gifts.

6. Hammad bin Zayd

As for Hammad bin Zayd al-Jahdi, he was among the most prominent jurists in Basrah and was one of the Imams of the Muslims.²⁷ He made friends with Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, and admired him, saying: "Ali b. al-Husayn was the most meritorious Hashimi I met."²⁸

Indeed the Imam was the best of the Hashimis of his time in high moral standards.

7. Yahya bin Sa'id

As for Yahya bin Sa'id b. Qays al-Ansari al-Madani, he was among the great figures of the next generation and among the most meritorious jurists and religious scholars.²⁹ He made friends with the Imam and knew of his outstanding merits, so he said these valuable words concerning him: "I heard 'Ali b. al-Husayn, and he was the best Hashimi I met."³⁰

The Imam, peace be on him, became the lord of all the Hashimis through his faith, his fear of Allah, his abundant knowledge, and other outstanding qualities.

8. Malik

Malik said: "There was no person among the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt) like 'Ali b. al-Husayn."³¹

9. Abu' Bakr bin al-Barqi

Abu' Bakr bin al-Barqi said: "Ali b. al-Husayn was the most meritorious one of his time."³²

10. Abu' Zar'a

Abu' Zar'a said: "I have never seen a person more knowledgeable in jurisprudence than him, meaning 'Ali b. al-Husayn."³³

11. Abu' Hazim

Abu' Hazim said: "I have never seen a Hashimi more meritorious than 'Ali b. al-Husayn."³⁴ He also said: "I have never seen a person more knowledgeable than 'Ali b. al-Husayn in jurisprudence."³⁵

12. Abu' Hatam al-A'raji

Abu' Hatam al-A'raji said: "I have never seen a Hashimi more meritorious than 'Ali b. al-Husayn.[36](#)"

13. Abu' Hamza al-Thumali

Thabit b. Safiya known as Abu' Hamza, the trustworthy and trusted one, said: "I have never heard that there is a person more ascetic than 'Ali b. al-Husayn except 'Ali b. Abi Talib.[37](#)" He said once: "I have never heard that there is a person more ascetic than 'Ali b. al-Husayn, who caused to weep all those who were in his presence when he talked about asceticism and preaching.[38](#)"

14. Imam al-Sadiq

His (Zayn al-'Abidin's) grandson said: "None of 'Ali's children or his family was more like and nearer to him in manner of dress and understanding than 'Ali b. al-Husayn.[39](#)" Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was the most similar of all the people to his grandfather, Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, in worshipping, knowledge, and all other characteristics. He was a picture of that great figure who enlightened the world with his knowledge.

15. 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz

'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was among those who respected Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, and knew of his high position. The Imam, peace be on him, met 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, and when he left him, he ('Umar) turned to his companions and asked them: "Who is the noblest of all the people?"

A mercenary from among his companions answered: "You are the noblest of all the people."

However, he told them the truth, saying: "No, the noblest of all the people is the person who has just left me, meaning Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, who wants the people to be with him and does not want to be with any of them.[40](#)"

This means that the Imam, peace be on him, attained a position of which none of the people attained. The people liked making ties or relations with the Imam because of his high social rank. For example, when the Imam died, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz praised him with these words: "The lamp of this world, the beauty of Islam, and the adornment of the worshippers (Zayn al-'Abidin) passed away.[41](#)"

16. Yazid bin Mu'awiya

Acknowledging the excellent traits of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, was not confined to his followers, rather it included his enemies and those who harbored malice against him. For example, Yazid b. Mu'awiya, who was the mortal enemy of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them, confessed the Imam's outstanding characteristics. This was when the Syrians asked him to let him

deliver a speech, so Yazid, the tyrannical one, fearfully said: “He (Zayn al-‘Abidin) is among the members of the House who were provided with abundant knowledge. He will not come down (from the pulpit) until he exposes me and the family of Abi Sufyan.”

With these words of his, Yazid b. Mu‘awiya demonstrated that the Imam was a knowledgeable man and eloquent speaker, and that he had strong explanations and wonderful deductions through which he would be able to change the attitude against the Umayyad government.

17. ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marw’an

‘Abd al-Malik bin Marw’an was another enemy from among the enemies of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them; nevertheless he admitted the outstanding merits of the Imam. This was when he met him and saw his weakness due to excessive worshipping. So he said to him with astonishment: “Exertion has appeared on your face while Allah has already promised to grant you good, you are part of Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, your lineage is close to him, your means is certain, you have outstanding merits over the people of your House and time, and you are endowed with virtues, knowledge, religion, and piety with which none before or after you has ever been endowed with except your previous ancestors.⁴²”

18. Mansu’r al-Dawaniqi

Mansu’r al-Dawaniqi was another enemy from among the enemies of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them; nevertheless he admitted to the outstanding qualities of the Imam. This was when he sent a letter to Dhi al-Nafs al-Zakiya. In the letter he said: “None like him (Zayn al-‘Abidin) was born among you (‘Ali’s grandsons) after the death of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family.⁴³”

19. Al-Farazdaq

Al-Farazdaq, the Arab great poet, was among those who admired the values of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, and believed in his high and holy character. He composed his immortal ode to show Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin’s outstanding qualities and inclinations. This was when Hisham denied recognizing the Imam before the Syrians lest they should admire him. So al-Farazdaq introduced the Imam to them, saying:

This is he whose ability the valley (of Mecca)

recognizes, and whom the (Sacred) House

recognizes (as do) the sanctuary and the area

outside the sanctuary (al-hill).

*This is the son of the best of all Allah's
servants. This is the pure pious man, the pure
eminent man.*

*When he comes to touch the corner of the wall
of the Kaaba, it almost grasps the palm of his
hand.*

*He takes care to be modest and he is protected
from his error. He only speaks when he smiles.*

*None of mankind has within their souls such
primacy as he does nor such grace as he does.*

Whoever knows Allah, knows His friend (wali)

Religion is from the House of this man.

*When Quraysh saw him, their spokesmen told
of the outstanding qualities of this man which
indicate (his) nobility.*

The Imam was the greatest picture al-Farazdaq saw in the world of honor and virtues, so he admired and adored him.

20. Al-Himyari

As for al-Himyari, he dedicated his talents to the members of the House, who were the source of mercy and virtue on the earth. So he composed poetry about their laudable deeds and outstanding merits, for example, he praised Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, in this line of poetry:

The fourth of them is 'Ali, the possessor of
efforts, through whom the religion and the
world are established.[44](#)

21. Ibn Shahab

Ibn Shahab said: “I have never seen a Qarashi more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.[45](#)”

22. Ibn Zayd

Ibn Zayd said: [My father said:] “I have never seen a person greater than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.[46](#)”

These are some contemporaries of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, whether they loved him or harbored malice against him. They unanimously agreed that the Imam was a man with piety and knowledge of Islam

The Historians

As for the historians, despite their different thoughts and inclinations, they unanimously agreed that the Imam was a great man who possessed many abilities and talents which raised him to the height of honor to which his great fathers reached. The following are some of their words concerning him:

1. Ibn ‘Asakir

Al-Hafiz Abu’ al-Qasim, ‘Ali b. al-Hasan al-Shafi’i, known as bin ‘Asakir, said in the biography of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn was trustworthy and trusted. He had many traditions and was high, lofty, and pious.[47](#)” These are the most valuable qualities in the world of Islam.

2. Ibn Sa’d

Muhammad b. Sa’d said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn was trustworthy and trusted. He had many traditions and was high, lofty, and pious.[48](#)” Ibn ‘Asakir agreed with b. Sa’d on giving these outstanding qualities to Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him.

3. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn, Zayn al-‘Abidin, b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib was trustworthy, trusted, a worshiper, jurist, and meritorious. Ibn ‘Ayyina reported on the authority of al-Zuhri, who said: ‘I have never seen a Qarashi more meritorious than him.’[49](#)”

4. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami

Shahab al-Din Ahmed b. Hajar al-Haythami said: “It was Zayn al-‘Abidin who inherited knowledge, asceticism, and worshipping from his father. He was great in forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance.[50](#)” Zayn al-‘Abidin was the successor of his father, so he inherited his father’s valuable qualities such as knowledge, asceticism, worship, forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance toward those who mistreated him.

5. Al-Dhahabi

Muhammad b. Ahmed b. 'Uthman al-Dhahabi said: "He (Zayn al-'Abidin) had wonderful majesty. He was appropriate for the greatest Imamate because of his honor, righteousness, knowledge, reverential fear, and perfect intellect.[51](#)"

Al-Dhahabi confessed that the Imam, peace be on him, possessed brilliant qualities, that he was worthy of the greatest Imamate of this community, the spiritual and temporal leadership which is the highest and most important position in Islam.

6. Abu' al-Fath

Abu' al-Fath b. Sadaqa said: "Imam 'Ali b. al-Husayn, known as Zayn al-'Abidin, b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with them, was one of the twelve Imams and among the chiefs of the next generation.[52](#)"

7. Abu' Na'eem

Al-Hafiz Abu' Na'eem said: "Ali b. al-Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin and Manar al-Qanitin (the signpost of the Allah-fearing) b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, was a sincere, munificent worshipper.[53](#)" Abu' Na'eem talked about some outstanding qualities of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, such as worship, sincerity, and generosity.

8. Al-Ya'qu'bi

Ahmed b. Abi Ya'qu'b said: "He (Imam Zayn al-'Abidin) was the most meritorious of all the people in worshipping. He was called Zayn al-'Abidin (the ornament of the worshippers). He was also called Dhu' al-Thafanat (the one with calluses) because there were marks of prostration on his forehead.[54](#)"

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was the most meritorious of all the people in worshipping and obeying Allah.

9. Al-Waqidi

Al-Waqidi said: "He (Zayn al-'Abidin) was the most pious of all the people and the most obedient of them to Allah. When he walked, he did not brandish his hands.[55](#)" Al-Waqidi mentioned the Imam outstanding traits such as piety, worship, reverential fear, and humbleness. Because of these qualities he was the most meritorious of all the people and the greatest of them.

10. Safi al-Din

Safi al-Din said: "Zayn al-'Abidin was (a person) with great guidance and a righteous way. In his (book) al-Jami', al-Khatib reported on the authority of b. 'Abbas, on the authority of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, who said: 'Guidance, righteousness, and moderation are parts of twenty-five

parts of prophethood.[56](#)”

11. Al-Nawawi

Al-Nawawi said: “They (the historians) unanimously agreed on his (Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin’s) greatness in everything.[57](#)”

The Muslims have unanimously agreed on glorifying and admiring the Imam because he was endowed with excellent qualities of which all the Muslims boast.

12. ‘Imad al-Din

‘Imad al-Din Idris al-Qarashi said: “Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn, Zayn al-‘Abidin, was the most meritorious of all the Household of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, the noblest of them after al-Hasan and al-Husayn, peace be on them, and the best of them in piety, asceticism, and worshipping.[58](#)”

13. Ibn ‘Anba

Ibn ‘Anba, a famous genealogist, said: “His (Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin’s) outstanding merits are more than to be counted or to be encompassed by a description.[59](#)” Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin’s laudable deeds and outstanding merits are countless, and no one can describe them, for they were a natural extension to the conduct of his grandfathers, who enlightened this world with their laudable deeds and outstanding merits.

14. Shaykh al-Mufeed

Shaykh al-Mufeed Said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn was the most meritorious of Allah’s creatures after his father in knowledge and action. Non-Shi‘a jurists (‘ama) report countless traditions in the religious sciences on his authority. Sermons, prayers (details of) the merits of the Qur’an, accounts of the laws of what is permitted and forbidden, and the raids (maghazi) and battles (ayyam) (during the time of the Prophet) have been recorded on his authority. He was famous among the religious scholars.[60](#)”

15. Al-Jahiz

Abu’ ‘Uthman ‘Umar b. Bahr al-Jahiz said: “The Kharijites, the Shi‘ites, the Mu‘tazilites, and non-Shi‘a have unanimously agreed that ‘Ali b. al-Husayn was meritorious and superior (to others).[61](#)” This means that all the Muslims, despite of their different thoughts and inclinations, have unanimously agreed that the Imam was great and meritorious, so they loved and followed him.

16. Al-Sharawi

Al-Sharawi said: “He (Zayn al-‘Abidin), may Allah be pleased with him, was a devoted worshiper, ascetic, pious, humble, and polite.[62](#)”

It was these qualities that raised the Imam to the zenith of glory and made the people adore and obey him.

17. Al-Qulaybi

Ahmed Al-Qulaybi al-Shafi'i said: "His (Imam Zayn al-'Abidin's) outstanding merits are more than to be counted or to be encompassed by a description.[63](#)"

18. Ibn Taymiya

Ibn Taymiya, though he deviated from the Household and showed enmity toward them, acknowledged the Imam's outstanding merits and high position. He said: "As for 'Ali b. al-Husayn, he was among the leading figures of the next generation in knowledge and religion. He had humility, secret alms, and other qualities. He was famous.[64](#)"

19. Al-Shaykhani

Al-Shaykhani al-Qadiri said: "As for our lord Zayn al-'Abidin, 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, his hands (generosity) and laudable deeds were famous. His beauties were well-known. He possessed a great rank and was good-hearted. He had apparent miracles which the eyes have seen and authentic traditions established.[65](#)"

The passengers talked about Imam Zayn al-'Abidin's outstanding merits and laudable deeds. His virtues and miracles were famous among the people. Allah endowed him with qualities with which He endowed His sincere servants.

20. Ibn Khullakan

Ibn Khullakan said: "H (Zayn al-'Abidin) was one of the twelve Imams and among the leading figures of the next generation. Al-Zuhri said: 'I have never seen a Qarashi more meritorious than him.'[66](#)"

21. Ibn Shaddqam

Ibn Shaddqam said: "'Ali b. al-Husayn, Zayn al-'Abidin, was an ascetic religious scholar.[67](#)"

22. Al-Manofi

Al-Sayyid al-Manofi said: "Zayn al-'Abidin was worshipping, sincere, generous, and pure. When he walked, his hand did not exceed his thigh.[68](#)"

23. Abu' al-Futu'h

Abu' al-Futu'h al-Husayni said: "The immortal reputation was for the middle 'Ali, Zayn al-'Abidin. He

was the first son of al-Huysayn's sons, the fourth infallible (Imam) according to the view of the twelve Imam (Shi'ites), and an ascetic (person) according to the view of other than them.[69](#)"

24. Al-Manawi

Al-Manawi said: "Zayn al-'Abidin was a firm Imam. His hands (generosity) and noble deeds were famous. His outstanding merits well-known. He had a great position. He was good hearted. He was the head of the body of presidency. He was the expected one for policy and ruling the subjects.[70](#)"

The Imam, peace be on him, was distinguished by great characteristics which qualified him, according to the consensus of all the Muslims, for undertaking the Imamate and general leadership and managing the affairs of the Muslims, for there was no person during his time more meritorious than him in good inclinations and great talents.

25. Muhammad bin Tallha

Kamal al-Din Muhammad bin Tallha al-Qarashi said: "Zayn al-'Abidin was the example of those who renounced the worldly pleasures, lord of the Allah-fearing, and Imam of the believers. His outstanding qualities bear witness that he was among the progeny of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family. His appearance shows his proximity to Allah. His calluses record his prayers and spending the night in prayer. His renouncing the worldly pleasures indicates his asceticism in this world. The morals of devoutness streamed for him, so he surpassed them. The lights of perpetuation shined for him, so he followed them. The litanies of worship associated him, so he was intimate with them. The works of obedience allied with him, so he adorned himself with their ornament. He took night as a mount to cover the road to the next world. The thirst of the midday heat was his guide through which he sought the right way to the lighthouse. He had the miracles which the eyes saw and authentic traditions established. He is among the kings of the hereafter.[71](#)"

26. Muhammad bin Sa'id

Muhammad bin Sa'id said: "He (Imam Zayn al-'Abidin) was trustworthy, trusted, high, lofty, pious, and had many traditions.[72](#)"

27. Al-Sayyid 'Abbas

Al-Sayyid 'Abbas al-Mu'sawi said: "Zayn al-'Abidin was the best of the people in face, the sweetest of them in perfume, the noblest of the in soul, the highest of them in lineage, and the greatest of them in honor.[73](#)"

28. Al-Sayyid Mohsin

Al-Sayyid Mohsin al-Amin al-'Amili said: "He (Zayn al-'Abidin) was the most meritorious of the people

of his time in knowledge, jurisprudence, piety, worship, generosity, clemency, patience, eloquence, high moral standards, alms, kindness to the poor, and loyalty to the Muslims. The relatives, the people, the friends, and the enemies glorified him. Yazid b. Mu'awiya commanded the people of Medina to Pledge allegiance to him as slaves except Zayn al-'Abidin. He commanded him to pledge allegiance to him as his brother and cousin.[74](#)"

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was distinguished by all the great qualities. All the outstanding qualities by which man is distinguished and through which he becomes noble were part of the Imam's outstanding qualities and merits. So he was as it was said:

You were created free from all defects

as if that you were created as you wished.

29. Al-Nuwayri

Shahab al-Din Ahmed b. 'Abd al-Wahhab Al-Nuwayri said: "Ali b. al-Husayn was reliable, pious, trusted, and had many traditions. He was the most meritorious of the members of his family and the best of them in obedience.[75](#)"

30. Al-Shafi'i

Imam Al-Shafi'i said: "Ali b. al-Husayn was the most meritorious of all the people of Medina in jurisprudence.[76](#)"

31. 'Ali bin 'Isa al-Arbali

Abu' al-Hasan 'Ali bin 'Isa b. Abi al-Fath al-Arbali said: "The outstanding qualities of 'Ali b. al-Husayn are more than the stars. The one who describes them goes to a boundless place. They appear in the sky of outstanding qualities as the stars appear for those who seek guidance through them. How is that not? He (Zayn al-'Abidin) surpasses all the world's inhabitants with the exception of 'Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan, al-Husayn. (Of course, this rhymed prose has been advanced, so do not be hesitant.) When you give the intellect its right, you will find whatever you want of glory and rightness, for he is a divine Imam, luminous temple, the substitute of the substitutes, the ascetic of the ascetics, the pole of the poles, the worshipper of the worshippers, the light of the lamp of the Message, the center of the circle of the Imamate, Ibn al-Khiyaratayn (the son of the best two), the one with two generous sides (father and mother), the peace of the heart, and the delight of the eye. 'Ali b. al-Husayn, and what will make you comprehend what 'Ali b. al-Husayn is? (He was) repentant, the one who wept very much, the one who put into effect the Sunna and the Book, said right words, devoted himself to the mihrab, preferred (people) to himself, and became high through the degrees of knowledge.

His day surpassed his yesterday. He was unique in knowledge. He was the best of all creatures in

inherited and newly acquired (qualities). He resorted to honor, so he ascended to its top and became important in all its affairs. He defeated (all the people) through what he had such as good birthplace, noble origin, and pure descent. The tongues of those who describe him are unable to depict him. He was unique in his privacy during his whispered prayers. So the angels admired his attitudes. His fear of his Lord made his tears flow. So he exceeded the heavy, pouring rain. So, may Allah support you, carefully consider his traditions, take into consideration his signs, think about his asceticism, his worship, his humility, his night prayers, his punctual prayers, his preferring (people to himself), his alms, his gifts, his pleading (to Allah), his purity, and his eloquence which indicate his humility to his Lord, his standing as the standing of the disobedient in spite of his firm obedience, his confessing the sins in spite of his innocence, his weeping, his wailing, the beating of his heart out of the fear of Allah, his shaking all over, and his standing (for prayer).

When it got dark, he whispered to his Lord, may His names be holy, addressed Him, the Exalted, cleaved to the Door of Him, the Great and Almighty, imagined that he was before Him, turned away from everything (other than Him), devoted himself to Him, he separated (himself) from this mean world, and was free from the human corpse. So his body prostrated on the earth while his soul was clinging to the world of angels. He fidgeted when he passed by a threatening verse as if the verse concerned him, while he was far from it. Thus, you find wonderful affairs, strange conditions, and a soul close to Allah, the Glorified, and you know with the knowledge of the one for whom the curtain was disclosed and the doors were open that this fruit is from that tree, as one is part of ten, this fresh drop from that noble fountain, this new one from that old one, this pearl from that abundant sea, this star from that bright moon, this growing branch from that firm origin, and this result from that premise. So this one (Zayn al-‘Abidin) whose origin was pure was the successor of Muhammad, ‘Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and Fatima, the honored, the glorified.[77](#)”

Al-Arbali, a scholar and researcher, has mentioned the most prominent qualities of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, which are among the places of pride for every Muslim, for his qualities are a natural extension to the qualities and inclinations of his fathers, who changed the course of human history and enlightened man’s way and guided him to signposts of the truth when he had been straying in the remote mysterious fields of this world.

Description cannot encompass the outstanding merits and laudable deeds of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, nor can explanation meet them, for he was a branch of the tree of prophethood and of the large tree of the Imamate in which Allah has put absolute perfection in order to be a signpost for the truth in the earth.

32. Al-Bustani

Al-Bustani said: “Zayn al-‘Abidin is Abu’ al-Hasan, ‘Ali b. al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib. He was given the nick-name of Zayn al-‘Abidin because of his plentiful worship. He was also given the nick-name of Sayyid al-‘Abidin (the Lord of worshippers), the pure, the trusted one, and the one with calluses.[78](#)”

33. Wajjdi

Muhammad Fareed Wajjdi said: “Zayn al-‘Abidin is Abu’ al-Hasan, ‘Ali b. al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, better known as Zayn al-‘Abidin. He was also called al-Asghar (the younger). Al-Husayn b. ‘Ali had no descendants except from the children of Zayn al-‘Abidin. He (Zayn al-‘Abidin) is one of the twelve Imams according to the doctrine of the Imami Shi‘ites, and he was also among the lords and chiefs of the next generation.[79](#)”

34. Agha Buzurg

The Chief of the researchers, Muhammad Hasan, better known as Agha Buzurg al-Tahrani, said: “Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, the lord of those who prostrated themselves in prayer, Ali b. al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, peace be on them, is the fourth Imam of the Imami Shi‘ites. The Muslim historians have unanimously agreed that he was the most meritorious of all the people in piety, asceticism, and worshipping.[80](#)”

35. Ibn al-Jawzi

Ibn al-Jawzi said: “Zayn al-‘Abidin (the ornament of the worshippers), is a model for the ascetics, and lord of the Allah-fearing. His outstanding merits bear witness that he was from among the progeny of Allah’s Apostle, his righteousness proves that he has nearness to Allah, his calluses record for him that he prayed very much and that he spent the night in praying, and his renouncing the worldly pleasures denotes his asceticism.[81](#)”

36. Tajj al-Din

Tajj al-Din b. Muhammad b. Hamza al-Husayni, the Chief of Halab, said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn was the lord of the Hashimites, the place of their knowledge, and the most meritorious one of them.[82](#)”

37. ‘Arif Tamir

‘Arif Tamir said: “He (Zayn al-‘Abidin) was famous for asceticism, and worship. None was similar to him in these qualities, so he was given the nick-name of Zayn al-‘Abidin and al-Sajjad (the one who prostrates himself very much in prayer).[83](#)”

38. Al-Zarkali

Khayr al-Din Al-Zarkali said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib al-Hashimi, al-Qarashi, Abu’ al-Hasan, the one whose nick-name is Zayn al-‘Abidin, is the fourth Imam of the Shi‘ites. He was one of those who were examples for clemency and piety. He was called ‘Ali al-Asghar (the younger) to distinguish him from his brother ‘Ali al-Akkbar (the elder).[84](#)”

39. Ahmed Mahmu'd Subhi

Dr. Ahmed Mahmu'd Subhi said: “Ali b. al-Husayn inherited his Imamate through his lineage to Fatima, the chaste. He drew for the Shi'ites the way of the spiritual Imamate, impressed Shiism with the impression of everlasting sadness and continuous weeping over al-Husayn, and dedicated himself to worshipping, so he was given the nick-name of al-Sajjad and the Kunya of Zayn al-'Abidin. He descended from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and from Kasra, so he was known as Ibn al-Khiyaratayn (the son of the best two).[85](#)”

Dr. Ahmed Subhi mentioned that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, inherited the Imamate through his descending from his grandmother, Fatima the chaste, mistress of the women of the world. It is necessary for us to discuss this matter with the Doctor. As for this claim, it is untrue, for the Imamate does not depend on inheritance; rather it depends on text (tradition), and it is in the hand of Allah, the Exalted, Who chooses for it those who have good inclinations and outstanding merits. This is what the Shi'ites believe in, and it is proven in their books of theology. It was not Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, who impressed Shiism with the impression of sadness for Imam al-Husayn, lord of the youth of Heaven; rather it was the tragedy of Karbala', whose terrors melt the hearts, which impressed Shiism with the world of sorrow and sadness. Zayn al-'Abidin was in the foremost of who were affected by it, for he saw all its sorrowful stages.

40. Ahmed Fahmi

Shaykh Ahmed Fahmi said: “He (Imam Zayn al-'Abidin) was the most meritorious of the people of his time in knowledge, jurisprudence, piety, worship, generosity, clemency, eloquence, and noble lineage. He helped the poor and the weak.[86](#)”

41. Husayn 'Ali Mahfu'z

Dr. Husayn 'Ali Mahfu'z said: “Zayn al-'Abidin was the best of Allah's creatures in knowledge and action. He was the most similar of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them, to the Commander of the faithful in the manner of clothing, knowledge, and worship.[87](#)”

Important Points

The words of the contemporaries concerning the Imam and of the historians are full of important points. The following are some of them:

1. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, was the most knowledge of the people of his time in the affairs of the Islamic law and precepts of religion.
2. He was the best of all the Hashimites and the Qarashis of his time, this is because he was endowed with outstanding qualities and ideals with which no one was endowed except his grandfathers.

3. He was the best of the people of his time and the greatest of the them in importance and position, this is because of his noble lineage, he was Ibn al-Khiyaratayn (the son of the best two) in addition to his genius and great talents.
4. He was the most ascetic of all the people in turning away from the worldly pleasures.
5. He was the best of all the people in piety, reverential fear, and clinging to the religion.
6. He was the lamp of this world and beauty of Islam⁸⁸, this is because his outstanding conduct was among the qualities of the Prophet and the Imams.
7. He was the best of the people in manners, the sweetest of them in perfume, the most generous of them in soul, and the greatest of them in honor.
8. He was the most eloquent of all the people, for his supplications, his preaching, and his wise sayings are among the sources of Arab literature and among the most valuable and cultural provisions in the world of Islam.
9. He was the kindest of all the people to the poor and the most merciful of them to the miserable and the deprived.
10. He was the best of all the people in worship and obedience to Allah, for there was no one like him in worship and obedience to Allah except his grandfathers.
11. He was the best of all the people in morals, for he was similar to his grandfather, the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, in high moral standards.
12. He was appropriate for presidency, the spiritual and temporal leadership of the community.
13. The Muslims unanimously agreed that he was great and virtuous, and that none of his opponents was able to defame him.

These are some points concerning the words of the contemporaries to the Imam and of the historians, despite their different inclinations and doctrines. They establish the most sublime view of the Shi'ites who are of the opinion that it is necessary for the Imam to be the most righteous and the most knowledgeable of the people of his time.

¹. Al-'Aqd al-Farid, vol. 2, p. 251.

². Hayat al-Imam Mohammed al-Baqir.

³. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, p. 147.

⁴. Tadhhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 9, p. 445.

⁵. Khulasat Tahdhib al-Kamal, M 7/Q/2. Abu` al-Faraj al-Asfahani, al-Aghani, vol. 15, p. 325.

⁶. Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p. 104.

⁷. Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 37. Tarikh al-Islam, vol. 2, p. 266. Al-Kashif, vol. 2, p. 282. Tabaqat al-Fuqaha', vol. 10, p. 34.

8. Tahdhib al-Lughat wa al-Asma', part 1, p. 343.
9. Al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, vol. 3, part 1, p. 178.
10. Khulasat Tahdhib al-Kamal, M 7/Q2, p. 336. Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, vol. 1, p. 75. Shadharat al-Dhahab, vol. 1, p. 105. Al-'Ibar fi Akhbar men Ghabar, vol. 1, p. 111.
11. Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 238. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 12, p. 19.
12. Roudat al-Jinan, vol. 7, p. 248. Kashf al-Ghumma.
13. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, p. 140.
14. Bihar al-Anwar.
15. 'Ilal al-Sharai', p. 88. Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 5, p. 541. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 46. p. 64.
16. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 12, p. 19. Kashf al-Ghumma, vol. 2, p. 288. Roudat al-Jinan, vol. 7, p. 246.
17. Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 4, p. 85.
18. Al-'Ibar fi Tarikh men Ghabar, vol. 1, p. 111. Kulasat Tahdhib al-Kamal, p. 231.
19. Tarikh al-Ya'qu'bi, vol. 3, p. 46.
20. Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 38. Kashf al-Ghumma, vol. 3, p. 392.
21. Al-Fusu'l al-Muhimma, p. 189.
22. Jammharat al-Awliya', vol. 2, p. 74.
23. Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 3, p. 395.
24. Tarikh Dimashq, 12/Q1/, p. 19.
25. Ibid.
26. Tabaqat al-Fuqaha', vol. 2, p. 34.
27. Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 3, p. 9.
28. Tahdhib al-Lughat wa al-Asma', part 1, p. 343.
29. Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 81, p. 222.
30. Tahdhib al-Kamal, M7/Q2, p. 336. Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, part 1, p. 343. Al-Tarikh al-Kabir, vol. 3, part 2, p. 266. Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat, vol. 1, p. 214. Al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, Q/1, vol. 3, p. 178.
31. Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 238. In Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, vol. 7, p. 305: "There was no person among the Household of Allah's Apostle like 'Ali b. al-Husayn."
32. Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 238.
33. Tarikh Dimashq, 12/Q1/p. 18.
34. Ibid., p. 19.
35. Tahdhib al-Kamal, M7/Q2/p. 336. Kashf al-Gumma.
36. Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, vol. 1, p. 75. Shadharat al-Dhahab, vol. 1, p. 105. Al-'Ibar fi Khabar men Ghabar, vol. 1, p. 111. Tarikh al-Islam, vol. 2, p. 16.
37. Safinat al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 571.
38. Al-Mufeed al-Amali, p. 117.
39. Al-Himyari, Divan, p. 362.
40. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, PP. 3-4. A similar narration has been mentioned in the book 'Muhadarat al-Udaba' by al-Raghib al-Asfahani, vol. 1, p. 166.
41. Al-Ya'qu'bi, Tarikh, vol. 3, 48.
42. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p. 75.
43. Al-Mubrrad, al-Kamil, vol. 2, p. 467. Al-'Aqd al-Farid, vol. 5, p. 310
44. Al-Himyari, Divan, p. 36.
45. Al-Basawi, al-Ma'rifa wa al-Tarikh, vol. 1, p. 360.
46. Ibid.
47. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, p. 142.
48. Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra, vol. 5, p. 222.
49. Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb, vol. 2, p. 35.
50. Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, vol. 119.

- [51.](#) Siyar 'Alam al-Nubala', vol. 4, p. 240.
- [52.](#) Durarr al-Abkar, p. 70.
- [53.](#) Hulyat al-Awliya', vol. 3, p. 133.
- [54.](#) Al-Ya'qu'bi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 104.
- [55.](#) Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p. 104.
- [56.](#) Wasilat al-Mal fi 'Add Manaqib al-AI, p. 208.
- [57.](#) Tahdhib al-Lughat wa al-Asma', Q1/343.
- [58.](#) 'Uyyu'n al-Akhbar wa Funu'n al-Athar, p. 144.
- [59.](#) 'Umdat al-Talib, p. 193.
- [60.](#) Al-Mufeed, al-Irshad.
- [61.](#) 'Umdat al-Talib, pp. 193-194.
- [62.](#) Al-Ithaf bi Hub al-Ashraf, p. 49.
- [63.](#) Tuhfat al-Raghib, p. 13.
- [64.](#) Minhajj al-Sunna, vol. 2, p. 123, first edition.
- [65.](#) Al-Sirat al-Sawi, p. 19.
- [66.](#) Wafayat al-'Ayan, vol. 2, p. 429.
- [67.](#) Zahrat al-Maqu'l, p. 6.
- [68.](#) Jammharat al-Awliya' wa A'lam Ahl al-Tasawwif, vol. 2, p. 71.
- [69.](#) Al-Nafha al-'Anbariya.
- [70.](#) Al-Kawakib al-Durriya, vol. 2, p. 139.
- [71.](#) Matalib al-Sa'u'l, vol. 2, p. 41.
- [72.](#) Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p. 104.
- [73.](#) Nazhat al-Jalees, vol. 2, p. 24.
- [74.](#) A'yan al-Shi'a, 4/Q1/308.
- [75.](#) Nihayat al-Irab fi Funu'n al-Adab, vol. 21, p. 324.
- [76.](#) Rasa'il al-Jahiz, p. 106. Nahjj al-Balagha, vol. 15, p. 274.
- [77.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, the Biography of 'Ali b. al-Husayn.
- [78.](#) Al-Bustani, Da'irat al-Ma'arif, vol. 9, p. 355.
- [79.](#) Da'irat Ma'arif al-Qarn al-'Ishreen, vol. 4, p. 793.
- [80.](#) Al-Dhree'a, vol. 13, p. 345.
- [81.](#) Tadhkirat al-Khawas.
- [82.](#) Ghayat al-Ikhtisar, p. 106.
- [83.](#) Al-Imama fi al-Islam, p. 116.
- [84.](#) Al-A'lam, vol. 1, p. 86.
- [85.](#) Nazariyat al-Imama, p. 307.
- [86.](#) Al-Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, p. 65.
- [87.](#) Al-Balagh Magazine, no. 7, first year, p. 54.
- [88.](#) 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz described him with that.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/life-imam-zayn-al-abidin-baqir-sharif-al-qurashi/chapter-6-impressions-his-character#comment-0>