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Epithets

Epithet is a word or phrase that expresses a quality or attribute which is considered to be a characteristic of the person or thing mentioned. 1 Epithets then reflect one's characteristics, whether good or bad.

To al-'Abbas a number of lofty epithets expressing his kind mentality and high moral standards have been ascribed:

Bab ul-Husayn

Like his father who was the door to the Prophet (S), al-'Abbas is the actual and spiritual door to Imam al-Husayn (a). Because of the high moral standards and great faithfulness of al-'Abbas, Imam al-Husayn used to choose him for every mission and depend upon him in every difficult situation. Likewise, al-'Abbas dedicated himself to being at the disposal of his brother. He was the protector and defender of the Prophet's household.

It is related that al-'Abbas used to call his brother as 'Master'. Only on one day and in one situation did al-'Abbas address his brother as brother. That was on the day of Ashura – when he fell down from his horse after his two hands had been severed and he had been struck on the head. In such an hour, a man longs to see the ones he loves for the last time. Only then did he shout as loud as possible – O Brother, reach your brother.

As soon as the Imam heard that voice, he hurried towards its source. He rode out, put his brother's head in his lap, began to wipe away blood and dust from his face, and asked about his pain. Al-'Abbas opened his eyes to see his brother's face, looked at him for the last time, and bid him farewell with a smile expressing all meanings of sincerity and loyalty.

As an answer, Imam al–Husayn (a) replied to his brother's farewell not with words, but with tears that dropped on the face of al-'Abbas while he was having the last sparks of his life. Thus, al-'Abbas emitted his last breaths while he was in the lap of his brother and he has become the door to reaching him.

Hence, it is recommended for the pilgrims of the tomb of Imam al-Husayn (a) to begin first with visiting

the tomb of al- 'Abbas. This is one of the confirmations of al-'Abbas' being the door to his brother – the chief of the martyrs.

The door intended here is the mental and spiritual. Al-'Abbas, hence, is the spiritual door to Imam al-Husayn, and this meaning is very far from the familiar meaning of portership or secretariat. Al-'Abbas is too far above such meanings and Imam al-Husayn (a) is also too far above taking doorkeepers or secretaries, since he is beyond all material limits.

Qamar Bani Hashim

Al-'Abbas was so bright-faced and handsome. Hence, he was called Qamar Bani Hashim – Moon of the Hashemites. He was also the moon of his family and the moon of Islam because he paved the path of martyrdom with light and shone upon the lives of Muslims.

He was so bright-faced that the light of his countenance lit all darkness and everybody admired his handsomeness. When it happened that al-'Abbas was accompanied by his nephew 'Ali al- Akbar who is known for his similarity to the Prophet physically and morally – the people of Medina stopped in lines to watch their bright-facedness.2

As-Saqqaa

During the battle of at–Taff and the few days preceding it, Ubaidullah ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, imposed a blockade on the sources of water so as to prevent Imam al–Husayn (a), his household and army from having water. Al–'Abbas, undertook the mission of fetching water to the camp and harem of his brother. He pushed himself among the large gatherings of that army and reached the River Euphrates several times. On that account, he had the epithet as – Saggaa – the provider of water.

Al-'Abbas and Watering

From his forefathers, al-'Abbas inherited the mission of serving water. Other than the other Koreshite clans, the Hashemites exclusively undertook the mission of serving water for the unparalleled qualities of generosity, munificence and honor that they enjoyed.

Historians have recorded that Qussay ibn Kelab was the foremost to serve water to the pilgrims of the Sacred House of God in Mecca. After him, his son Abd–Menaf inherited this mission and left it to his son Hashim who too, left it to his son Abd–ul–Muttalib. The latter undertook this mission so perfectly that God conferred upon him with the bliss of the well Zamzam. After Abd–ul–Muttalib, Abu–Talib undertook this mission then handed it over to his brother al–'Abbas ibn Abd–ul–Muttalib.

On the day of the conquest of Mecca, al-'Abbas offered this mission to the Prophet (S) who gave it back to him.

Furthermore, history is full of narrations mentioning that the Prophet (S) served water to his companions on many occasions before and after prophecy.

Imam 'Ali Amir ul-Muminin also served the Muslim army with water on the night before the day of the Battle of Badr. On the day of the Hudaibiya Treaty, Imam 'Ali served the Prophet and the Muslims with water.

When Uthman ibn Affan was blockaded at his house, Imam 'Ali ordered his sons to send him water. Finally, during the battle of Siffin Imam 'Ali allowed the other party to drink from the water which was under his control whereas, Muawiya prevented Imam 'Ali's army from reaching the river when it was he who had first controlled it.

Like their father, the Imams al-Hasan and al-Husayn supplicated to God for rain for people of Kufa when they were afflicted by drought. Because of the Imam's supplication, the city of Kufa was watered with heavy rain that reurned life to it.

After all, history has not forgotten the situation when Imam al-Husayn, after he had left Medina and Mecca and directed his caravan towards Kufa, served water to people of Iraq:

At the last hours of that night, Imam al–Husayn ordered his servants to fetch water as much as possible. They did although they did not know the reason. In their way, the caravan of the Imam met the army headed by al–Hurr ibn Yazid and they were intolerably thirsty under the heat of that sun and the iron of their military uniform. Only then did the servants of Imam al–Husayn know the reason why their master had asked them to take water as much as possible. Then the Imam (a) ordered, "Serve them with water and give their horses some."

Copying his fathers and two brothers, al-'Abbas ibn 'Ali assumed to himself the mission of serving water and he was completely worthy of it. On every occasion and every opportunity he could seize, al-'Abbas served the others with water. On the day of Ashura even more so than ever, he undertook this mission in several situations.

On the seventh of Muharram that year, Omar ibn Saad banned the army, household, harem, and children of Imam al– Husayn from reaching the river or taking a single drop of water. This blockade continued to the tenth of Muharram. This occurred in an area in the middle of Iraq which is known of its dry weather and it was summer.

Besides from all the conditions of that situation arose even more heat – heat of war, heat of swords and spears and the heat of breaths. To fetch water in such a situation is really a heroic deed that leaves a great effect on hearts. Hence, Abu'l–Fadhl al–'Abbas won this position not only in the hearts of people but also in the sight of God who conferred upon him innumerable merits and excellences.

Al-'Abbas carried out this mission so perfectly and appreciatively. He fetched water to the camp of Imam

al-Husayn three times. The first time was on the seventh of Muharram, as we have already mentioned.

The second time was on the ninth of Muharram. 3 It was not a long distance between the camp of Imam al– Husayn and the River Euphrates when Shemr ibn Thi'l–Jawshan shouted at the camp of Imam al– Husayn: "You can see this water flow like reptiles. We will never let you have a single drop from it until you join hell."

Just then al-'Abbas turned his face towards his brother and asked, "We are the right party, are we not?"

"Yes, by God, we are," answered Imam al-Husayn (a).

From this answer al-'Abbas understood that his brother would permit him to fetch water for those moaning with thirst among the harem and children. He therefore attacked the troops who were guarding the riverbank and was able to force them to leave their positions. Thus, Imam al-Husayn and his companions could easily reach the river and supply themselves with water.

That was the second time of al-'Abbas' watering.

The third time was on the tenth of Muharram. When Imam al-Husayn's camp lost many of the individuals and seemed to be losing the battle, the Imam called out, "Is there not any helper who may help us? Is there not anyone who may guard the harem of Allah's Messenger?"

Hearing these words from his brother, al-'Abbas approached his brother, kissed him on the face, and asked for permission for fighting. The Imam did not permit him, but he ordered him to fetch some water for the harem and children. Carrying out his brother's orders, al-'Abbas carried a water skin and attacked the troops on the riverside. He forced them to leave their positions.4

In some historical references it is mentioned that al-'Abbas was conferred with this great epithet of as-Saqqaa' after he had undertaken the mission of serving water to the caravan of his brother Imam al-Husayn on the ten days of Muharram, AH 60.

Battal ul-Alqami

Al-Alqami is the name of the river on whose bank was the last scene of the life of al-'Abbas. Along this river were gathered around a large number of soldiers whose mission was to prevent the camp of Imam al-Husayn (a) from getting any water.

By his giant determination and unmatched heroism, al-'Abbas attacked that army and occupied the river to carry water to the camp of his brother more than once. In the last attempt – he was martyred there. Hence, he was called 'Battal ul-Alqami' – the hero of al-Alqami.

Hamil ul-Liwaa

The holding of standards in wars is the most significant position in armies. Standards are given exclusively to the soldiers who enjoy special military abilities. During the battle of at–Taff, the standard was in the hand of Abu'l–Fadhl al–'Abbas who preserved and held it from the beginning of the tragic journey from Medina to up until the last spark of his life.

Al-'Abbas protected that standard so bravely and uniquely that he embraced it to his chest when his two hands were severed. In more than one situation, al-'Abbas asked his brother Imam al-Husayn for permission for fighting, but the Imam used to say to him, "You are the standard-bearer of my army. If you are martyred, my troops will separate".

It is also well known that standard-bearers are chosen according to special qualifications:

The standard-bearer must be accepted by everybody and must bear qualities such as courage, chivalry, and honor.

The standard-bearers must also exert all efforts to keep the standard high. For this reason, al-'Abbas exerted unique efforts for keeping the standard high. When his right hand was severed, he held the standard in the left. And when this one was also severed, he embraced the standard to his chest and held onto it until the last breath of his life.

Historians have also recorded that when the Umayyad army raided at the camp of Imam al-Husayn after his martyrdom – they robbed everything including the standard borne by al-'Abbas.

In Syria, when Yazid's sight fell on that standard, he was amazed. He noticed that it was completely stabbed at all places except at the place of its handle, where it was held. He asked about the bearer of that standard and was told that it was al-'Abbas ibn 'Ali.

Astonished by the courage of al-'Abbas, Yazid turned his face to the attendants and said: "Look at this standard! It is stabbed in every place except its handle. This clearly means that its bearer was so courageous and chivalrous that he faced all stabs and strokes without letting that standard fall from his hand. This is the true loyalty to a brother!!"

Hence, al-'Abbas was called 'Hamil ul-Liwaa', the standard- bearer.

Kebsh ul-Kateeba

This title is exclusively given to the higher commander whose mission is to protect and manage his troops. This title was conferred upon al-'Abbas for his unique courage and bravery during the battle of at-Taff when he protected the camp of Imam al-Husayn (a) and guarded the harem.

In fact, the Umayyad army including their commanders feared al-'Abbas; therefore, they made many seductive offers, such as the position of general commandment of the army – provided that he would leave the wing of Imam al-Husayn and join theirs.

When al-'Abbas was martyred, Imam al-Husayn became helpless. He declared: "My spine is now broken; I have lost every solution to happenings and my enemies are rejoicing at my misfortune."

At the same time, the eyes of his enemies which could not see rest so long as he was there became delighted by the martyrdom of al-'Abbas. While the eyes of Imam al-Husayn's harem and children, which were tranquil and delighted so long as they could see al-'Abbas protecting them, lost their rest forever.

Al-Ameed

This title is also addressed to the lofty military personalities. It was conferred upon al-'Abbas because he played the role of the support and commander of his brother's army.

Hami az-Zhaeena

Al- 'Abbas received this title because he played an honorable role in guarding and defending the harem of the Prophet (S), al-'Abbas was called 'Hami az-Zhaeena' - the protector of the harem. He was responsible for keeping watch over the harem and serving them during the journey from Medina to Karbala.

Bab ul-Hawaaij

People believed that God will surely settle the needs of him who implores to Him by seeking the intercession of al-'Abbas for the special rank that he enjoys in the sight of Almighty God for dedicating himself to the obedience to Imam al-Husayn. Hence, al-'Abbas is called 'Bab ul-Hawaaij' – the door to settlement of needs.

Ash-Shahid

Although this epithet, which means 'the martyr', is not as famous as the other epithets of al-'Abbas, it is mentioned in the statements of Abu'l-Hasan al-Umari and Abu-Nasr al-Bukhari when they refer to the biography of al-'Abbas ibn 'Ali. Abu-Nasr refers to a narration in which Imam as-Sadiq (a) calls al-'Abbas as 'ash-Shahid'.

Muawiya ibn Ammar al-Yazidi narrated:

I asked as-Sadiq (a) how they divided the donation of Fadak when it had been given back to them. He

answered: "We gave the descendants of al-'Abbas ash-Shahid 'the martyr' a quarter and took the rest for ourselves."

Al-Abd us-Salih

Historians and biographers should have recorded the epithet of 'al-Abd us-Salih' - The righteous servant (of God) along with the other epithets, because it refers to the highest rank one can attain.

In the special ziyara of al-'Abbas that Abu-Hamza ath-Themali narrated, Imam as-Sadiq (a) says:

"Salaam be upon you, the righteous servant!"

Prophets enjoy this rank, because it reflects the close, firm relation between man and the Almighty Lord. In the Holy Qur'an, God describes His prophets, including Prophet Muhammad (S) as righteous servants.

Al-Aabid

Al-'Abbas was also called 'al-Aabid' – the worshipper, for his distinctive worship to the Lord. It is natural without doubt that al- 'Abbas, being brought up in the center of the household of genuine worship – which is the house of the chief of the worshippers – Imam 'Ali Amir ul-Mu'minin, acquired the quality of worship supremely.

As-Saduq, in his Thawaab ul-A'maal, records that al-'Abbas ibn 'Ali was described as having the sign of prostration on his forehead. Thus, he is included with those described by God as:

"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Torah and their description in the Gospel; like as the seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good - forgiveness and a great reward."6

Since obedience is attached to pure worship, al-'Abbas was described by Imam as-Sadiq (a) as the Obedient. In the Ziyara authentically reported to be said by Imam as-Sadiq during his visit to the tomb of Abu'l-Fadhl al-'Abbas, the following statement is addressed to al-'Abbas:

"Salaam be upon you; the righteous servant (of God), the obedient to Allah, His Messenger, Amir ul-Mu'minin, al- Hasan, and al-Husayn, peace and greetings of Allah be upon them."

- 1. Excerpted from Oxford Talking Dictionary
- 2. See Fursan ul-Haijaa and Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani's Maqaatil ut-Talibiyyin
- 3. See al-Qummi's Muntaha al-Aamal as quoted from al-Mahaasin wa'l- Masaawi
- 4. According to al-Kulbasi's Al-Khassaaiss ul-'Abbasiyya, this third time of al-'Abbas' fetching water to the camp of Imam al-Husayn was not the last one which resulted in his martyrdom. Al-'Abbas had a fourth time of fetching water and it was in this very time that he was martyred.
- 5. Such as Tarikh ul-Khamis and Ibn Idris' As-saraair
- 6. The Holy Qur'an, Sura al-Fat'h (48), Verse (29)

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