

Slaves in the History of Islam

To give an idea of how Islam raised the status of slaves and treated them as human beings instead of brutes of burden (which was their common lot before Islam), the following tradition is of particular interest:

One day the Prophet was sitting with Salman, Bilal, 'Ammar, Suhayb, Khabbab [all ex-slaves] and a group of poor Muslims, when some unbelievers passed from there. When they saw these “unimportant” people with the Prophet, they said, “Have you chosen these persons from among your people? Do you want us to follow them? Has Allah bestowed His favour on them, that they have believed, and not us? You should better remove them from you; if you do so, then perhaps we would follow you.” The Prophet did not agree to their demand, and Allah sent the following verse in this respect:

And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favour; neither are you answerable for any reckoning of theirs, nor are they answerable for any reckoning of yours, so that you should drive them away and thus be of the unjust. And thus do We try some of them by others so that they say: “Are these they upon whom Allah has conferred benefit from among us?” Does not Allah know the grateful? (And when those who believe in our signs come to you, say: “Peace be upon you, your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself”) (6:52-54)

Salman, Bilal, 'Ammar and their companions say: “When Allah revealed these verses, the Prophet turned towards us, called us to come nearer to him, and said, 'Your lord has ordained mercy on Himself.' Then we used to sit with him, and when he wanted to stand up (and go from there), he did so. Then Allah revealed:-

And withhold yourself with those who call on their Lord in the morning and evening desiring His goodwill, and let not your eyes pass from them.. (18:28)

“When this was revealed, the Prophet used to make us sit so near him that our thighs almost touched his thighs; and he did not stand up before us. When we felt that the time had come for him to stand, we

took his leave; and then he stood up after we had gone. And he used to say to us, 'I thank God who did not take me out of this world until He ordered me to keep patience with a group of my *ummah*. I shall spend my life with you, and, after death, shall remain with you.'¹

I propose to give here a short list of some of the slaves who occupy the highest spiritual and temporal status in Islam and in the Muslim society, from the very beginning of Islam.

1. Salman, the Persian

First and foremost, of course, is Salman al-Farsi (the Persian). He was the son of a Zoroastrian priest in the province of Fars. From the very beginning, he was aspiring to find and follow a religion free from the embellishes of human interpolations. This was long before the advent of Islam. He was converted to Christianity, and served one distinguished priest after another in quest of divine knowledge.

After long lasting hardships and troubles, he attached himself to a monk in Antioch, who at the time of his death advised him that the time was ripe for the emergence of the last Prophet in the world. He told him to make his way towards Hijaz, the Arabian province which has Mecca and Medina in it. In the way, he was taken as a captive by a gang of warriors and was sold from one master to another, till he changed ten masters.

Lastly, he was purchased by a Jewess in Medina. It is not possible to give the details of the tortures meted out to him during his long-lasting captivity. Still it seems that fate was bringing him nearer to his goal, because it was in Medina that he met the Holy Prophet of Islam. After some subtle tests Salman recognised in him the long-awaited "that Prophet" of the New Testament (John 1:19-25). He accepted Islam.²

The Holy Prophet of Islam purchased him from his Jewess mistress and set him free. It was after the battle of Badr, the first battle of Islam, and before the battle of Uhud.³

Salman's faith, knowledge, piety and his unparalleled spiritual achievements put him above all the companions of the Holy Prophet. He is one of the four pillars of true Muslim faith (together with Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Miqdad and 'Ammar). He has the unique distinction of being included in the *Ahlul Bayt* (the family of the Prophet) by virtue of his faith and piety. The traditions showing his superiority and virtues cannot be narrated in this short booklet. Nevertheless, I am quoting some of them to give the readers a glimpse of his status in the eyes of the Prophet and his successors.

Though he had already accepted Islam, Salman did not participate in the battle of Badr because of his captivity at that time. After Badr, he took active part in all the battles fought to defend Islam and the Muslims. When the Qurayshites of Mecca together with many other tribes including the Jews of Medina, besieged Medina, it was Salman who advised the Prophet to dig a moat around Medina in order to prevent the enemy from attacking the weak points of the city. And it is for this reason that this battle is

called the “Battle of Moat (*khandaq*)”.[4](#)

It was at this battle that a friendly argument began between the emigrants of Mecca (the *muhajirun*) and the natives of Medina (the *ansar*). The subject: Was Salman a *muhajir* or an *ansar*? The *ansar* claimed that as Salman came to the Prophet in Medina, he belonged to the *ansar* group; the *muhajirun* claimed that as Salman had left his home and family, he was a *muhajir*.

This friendly dispute also shows how great had become the status of Salman within a short period of three years that every group wanted to claim him as their own. Anyhow, the dispute was referred to the highest authority – the Prophet, who decided that Salman was from neither of the two groups; he said ‘*Salman minna Ahl al-Bayt* – Salman is from us, the family [of the Prophet].’[5](#) It was such a great honour which has continuously been mentioned in traditions and poems.

A poet says:

The devotion of Salman was his pedigree, while there was no relationship between Noah and his son.

The Holy Prophet had also said, “Salman is a sea which cannot be exhausted and a treasure which never comes to end. Salman is from us, the family [of the Prophet]; he has been given wisdom, and is bestowed with reason.”[6](#) Imam 'Ali said, “Salman was like Luqman, the Sage.”[7](#) Luqman is thought by many Muslim scholars to be a prophet. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said that he was even better than Luqman.[8](#) Imam Muhammad al-Baqir said that Salman was from the *mutawassimin* (those who know the inner character of the people).[9](#) Numerous traditions say that Salman knew *al-ismul a'zam* (the greatest name of Allah);[10](#) and that he was from the *muhaddathin* (those to whom the angels talk).[11](#)

To show the greatness of Salman, it is enough that the Prophet said, “Faith has ten grades, and Salman is on the tenth (i.e., highest) grade, Abu Dharr on the ninth, and Miqdad on the eighth grade.” Whenever Gabriel came to the Prophet, he used to request him to convey the greetings of Allah to Salman, and to teach him the knowledge of the future.[12](#) Accordingly, Salman used to visit the Prophet at nights, where the Prophet and Amirul mu'minin 'Ali taught him from the secret knowledge of Allah which was never taught to any other person because nobody could bear it. It was because of this that Imam 'Ali said, “Salman got the knowledge of the first and the knowledge of the last ones; he is a sea which is never exhausted and he is from us – the family of the Prophet.”[13](#)

'Allamah Majlisi writes in *'Aynu'l-Hayat* that it is understood from the traditions of Shi'ah and Sunnis both that after the *ma'sumin* nobody among the companions of the Prophet was equal to Salman, Abu Dharr and Miqdad. Imam Musa al-Kazim said, “On the day of resurrection someone will call on behalf of Allah that 'Where are the *hawariyyin* and faithfuls of Muhammad bin 'Abdullah, who stayed firmly on the path shown by him and never broke his convent?' Then will arise Salman, Miqdad and Abu Dharr.”[14](#)

The Holy Prophet said, “Allah has ordered me to love four of my companions.” People asked who those four companions were. The Holy Prophet said, “Ali bin Abi Talib, Salman, Miqdad and Abu Dharr.”[15](#)

According to traditions, Allah sent for Salman gifts and presents from Paradise; and the Paradise eagerly awaited his arrival. [16](#)

Once Mansur bin Buzurg, himself of Persian origin, asked Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq as to why he remembered Salman al-Farsi so much. The Imam said, "Do not say 'Salman al-Farsi (the Persian)'. Say, 'Salman of Muhammad.' You should know that the reasons of my often remembering him are three of his special virtues: First, he discarded his own preferences in view of the preferences of Amirul mu'minin 'Ali. Second, he loved poor and preferred them against rich and wealthy persons. Third, he loved knowledge and knowledgeable persons. Verily Salman was a good servant of God, a pure Muslim and he was not from the polytheists." [17](#)

Once some companions of the Prophet were describing their forefathers, showing pride in their family-trees. Salman was also among them. 'Umar, who later became the second caliph, turned towards him and asked him to describe his pedigree and family-tree. Salman said, "I am Salman, son of a servant of Allah. I was poor, and Allah made me rich through Muhammad (upon whom be peace); I was a slave, and Allah set me free through Muhammad (upon whom be peace). This is my pedigree and my status, O 'Umar!" [18](#)

It has been stated earlier that Abu Dharr himself was one of the four pillars of faith and was on the ninth grade of faith (*iman*). But even Abu Dharr could not understand Salman properly.

Once he went to the house of Salman. Salman had put a cooking pot on fire. The two friends were talking when all of a sudden the pot tumbled down and overturned. But, wonder of wonders, not a single drop fell out of the pot. Salman put the pot on the fire again. After some time the same thing happened again. No drop was spilt out, and Salman nonchalantly put it right again.

Abu Dharr was flabbergasted. At once he came out and met Imam 'Ali in the way. He narrated to him what he had seen. 'Ali said, "O Abu Dharr, if Salman informs you of all the things that he knows, you will wonder. O Abu Dharr, Salman is a gate towards Allah on the earth. Anybody who accepts him is a believer, anybody who rejects him is a *kafir*. Salman is from us – the family [of the Prophet]." [19](#)

I think these few authentic traditions are enough to show the highest status of Salman in the eyes of Allah, in the eyes of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali and his successors.

Salman was appointed governor of Iran. He came to Mada'in, the capital at that time. The people of Mada'in, long accustomed to the splendour and glory of the imperial court of Iranian emperors, came out to welcome the governor designate. They were waiting for a pompous caravan. But no caravan or entourage ever came. Instead, an old man, carrying a few of his belongings on his shoulder was coming towards them on foot. They asked the newcomer whether he had seen the entourage of their governor. The newcomer said, "I am your governor." And that simple-hearted governor of Mada'in ruled with such knowledge, compassion, justice and firmness that within a short period whole Mada'in was in his hands. That conquest was made not by police or army, but by the power of his spiritual perfection, piety and

forbearance.

He died in 36 AH in Mada'in. Imam 'Ali came from Medina to Mada'in in half a day by miracle just to perform the burial rites of his trusted companion and brother.[20](#) It was a unique distinction of Salman. His grave in Mada'in (in Iraq) is visited by hundreds of pilgrims every day. The pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) prescribed for that visit shows his greatness in the eyes of Allah.

ii. Zayd bin Harithah

Zayd bin Harithah bin Sharahil al-Kalbi, an Arab boy, was abducted in his childhood and sold as a slave. This happened before Islam. Hakim bin Hizam bin Khuwaylid purchased him in the market of 'Ukaz, and presented him to his aunt, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, who gave him to the Holy Prophet.[21](#)

Zayd's father was searching for him. After a long time he came to know that Zayd was in Mecca. He came to Mecca and offered to pay ransom so that Zayd might be set free. The Prophet said that if Zayd wanted to be united with his family, then there was no need of any ransom. He was free to go. But Zayd declined to go with his father and preferred to remain with Muhammad. Harithah, Zayd's father, was extremely grieved and said, "O son, do you prefer to remain a slave rather than a free man? And do you prefer to leave your own father and mother for Muhammad?" Zayd said, "What I have seen of the life of Muhammad is compelling me that I should not leave him for any person". Such was the loving attitude of the Holy Prophet that it had captured the hearts of all those who came to know him. And it was this unique characteristic of his generosity which made almost the whole Arabia accept Islam within a short period of twenty three years.

Anyhow, Harithah was shocked and announced in Ka'bah that from then on neither he was father of Zayd nor Zayd was his son. It was then that Prophet Muhammad announced in the hijr Isma'il (besides the Ka'bah) that "I declare that from now on Zayd is my son." Harithah, hearing this, returned to his home but in a less gloomy mood.[22](#)

Zayd bin Harithah was now called Zayd bin Muhammad. This continued till 5 AH when the following verse was revealed:

God had not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body; nor has He made your wives whom you divorce by zihar your mothers; nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouths. But God tells you the truth, and He shows the (right) way. Call them by (the names of) their fathers, that is better in the sight of God. (33:4-5)

Then Zayd was again called Zayd bin Harithah.[23](#)

The Prophet had married Zayd to his cousin Zaynab bin Jahash, who was the daughter of his aunt, Umaymah.[24](#) When the couple started quarrelling and Zayd divorced Zaynab, the Prophet, on the command of Allah, married Zaynab himself. (She at that time was more than fifty years old.[25](#) This fact

alone is enough to clear away the thick cobweb of the malicious stories which the Prophet's enemies have woven around this holy marriage.)

Allah says in the Qur'an:

Then, when Zayd had dissolved (his marriage), He joined her in marriage to you in order that there may be no difficulty for the believers in the matter of marriage with the wives of their adopted sons when the latter had dissolved (their marriage) with the necessary (formality) with them, and God's command must be fulfilled. (33:37)

By these two marriages of Zaynab bin Jahash, two pagan taboos were abolished: By the first marriage, the idea of racial supremacy or the belief that being a slave or freed slave was a stigma on the dignity of the person was destroyed.[26](#)

When a cousin of the Prophet could be married to a freed slave who could frown in future on marriage of slaves with free women?[27](#)

And by the second marriage, the belief that an adopted son was a real son was destroyed. When the Prophet himself did marry the divorced wife of his adopted son, then how could it be claimed that an adopted son was a real son? Thus the custom of Arabia which recognised an adopted son as a real son was most effectively abolished.[28](#)

Zayd is the only person among the companions of the Prophet to be mentioned by name in the Qur'an. He was the third person to accept Islam after Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and 'Ali bin Abi Talib. Zayd was the commander of the Muslim army sent to fight against the Christian forces at Muta. After the martyrdom of Zayd, Ja'far, the cousin of the Prophet, took over the command and he also was martyred. The Prophet was much grieved on these two deaths.[29](#)

Zayd had a son, Usamah, from his first wife, Umm Ayman. Usamah was 19 years old when he was appointed the commander of the army which consisted of all the well-known companions of the Prophet, including Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. When some of the companions frowned upon this appointments, the Prophet delivered a lecture in which he said, "Zayd was better than you, and his son Usamah also is better than you all." Usamah was ordered by the Prophet to go with the army to avenge the death of his father at Muta.[30](#)

iii. 'Ammar bin Yasir

'Ammar bin Yasir was one of the most respected companions of the Prophet and the faithful follower of Imam 'Ali. He was from those who were brutally tortured in the cause of Islam. He did two *hijrahs* – to Ethiopia[31](#) and Medina; he prayed towards two *qiblahs* – Baytul Maqdis and Ka'bah. He participated in all the battles of Islam right from the beginning,[32](#) and was martyred in the battle of Siffin on 9th Safar, 37 AH.

'Ammar and his parents were amongst the first converts to Islam. His father Yasir was from the tribe of Qahtan in Yemen. He, together with his two brothers, came to Mecca in search of a lost brother. His brothers returned to their homeland; but Yasir stayed in Mecca where he entered into a covenant with Abu Hudhayfah (from the tribe of Bani Makhzum), and married his slave-girl, Sumayyah bint Khayyat. Yasir and Sumayyah begot two sons, 'Abdullah and 'Ammar, who according to the custom of Arabia, were considered the slaves of Abu Hudhayfah.[33](#)

After their conversion to Islam, Abu Jahl, with the help of other pagans, started torturing the whole family mercilessly. Ironnails were put upon their naked bodies and they were made to lie down on the burning sand of the desert. The heat of the sun and the desert sand made the iron mails hot like fire; their skins got burned. This torture used to continue till they became unconscious. Then the iron mails were removed and water was poured on them.[34](#) The Prophet felt very sorry for the suffering family; but was unable to protect them. Still he used to go near them and give them courage to forbear the tyrannies of their tormentors. He gave them good tidings of Heaven and said, “Be patient, O family of Yasir, because your promised place is Heaven”.[35](#)

Yasir and Sumayyah were brutally murdered by the pagans of the Quraysh, under the leadership of Abu Jahl. It is a great distinction of this distinguished family that all of them were martyred in the cause of Islam. Sumayyah was very pious and God-fearing lady; and she was the first woman martyr of Islam.

When his parents were killed, 'Ammar pretended to denounce Islam, and thus saved his life. Then he came to the Prophet bitterly weeping that he had to utter the words of *kufir* so that he could slip away from the hands of the infidels. The Prophet told him not to worry, as he had not uttered those words with his heart. In this connection, the following verse was revealed:–

He who disbelieves in God after his belief in Him – except he who is compelled (to do so) while his heart remains steadfast with the faith – and he who opened (his) heart for disbelief on them shall be the wrath of Allah and they, shall have a grievous chastisement. (The Qur'an 16: 10).[36](#)

When 'Ammar described the atrocities meted out to the blessed Sumayyah, the Prophet said, “Patience, O Abu Yaqzan; O Allah, do not punish anyone from the family of Yasir with hell-fire.”

When the Prophet came to Medina, and the mosque of the Prophet was being built, 'Ammar enthusiastically carried double load of the stones. At that time he started reciting some lines of poetry, which reached to the ears of 'Uthman (who later became the third caliph), who thought that 'Ammar was taunting him. Overcome by this misunderstanding, 'Uthman hit 'Ammar on the forehead; blood came gushing out and covered his face. He complained to the Prophet, who himself cleansed and dressed the wound and said, “Ammar is the skin between my eyes and nose.” Then he said, “Well, O 'Ammar, you will be killed by a rebellious group; you will be calling them to Heaven, and they will be calling you to Hell.”[37](#)

'Ammar's importance and honour can also be understood from the following sayings of the Prophet:

“Ammar is with the truth, and the truth is with 'Ammar wherever he may be. 'Ammar is the skin between my eyes and nose; and he will be killed by a rebellious group.³⁸ The Prophet also said, “Ammar is filled with faith (*iman*) from head to feet”.³⁹ There are numerous other traditions of the Prophet and the Imams concerning 'Ammar.

'Ammar was one of those faithful companions who always followed Imam 'Ali. In 35th AH when 'Ammar, along with many others, protested against 'Uthman bin 'Affan's (the third caliph) policy on the distribution of the public treasury, the latter got him beaten so mercilessly that the lining of his abdomen was burst and he got hernia.⁴⁰ As his father, Yasir had been an ally of Banu Makhzum, so they took 'Ammar (still unconscious) to their home and said that if 'Ammar died they would avenge him with 'Uthman.

As mentioned above, the Prophet had said that he would be killed by a rebellious group; and so it happened. 'Ammar was killed in the 37th year AH by the army of Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan. He was then 90 or 91 years old. On the day when he was martyred, he was fighting valiantly against the army of Mu'awiyah, when one Syrian, Abul Ghadiyah al-Muzani, fatally wounded him in the waist; his companions carried him to safety. He asked for water; someone gave him a cup of milk. He said, “True was the saying of the Prophet”. People asked him to explain. He replied, “The Prophet had informed me that my last sustenance from this world would be milk.” Then he drank some milk and after that he died.⁴¹

Amirul mu'minin 'Ali was informed of this tragedy. He came immediately and put 'Ammar's head on his lap and recited the following elegy for his faithful companion:

O death, which is to come to me anyhow, Better give me rest at once; Because thou hast finished off all my friends, I see that thou doth recognise all my beloved ones, as though someone is guiding thee to them specially.

Then reciting “**verily we are of God and to God will we return,**” he said, “Anybody who is not extremely grieved on the death of 'Ammar has no share in Islam. May Allah have mercy on 'Ammar.” Amirul mu'minin himself said prayer on him, and buried him by his own hands.⁴²

'Ammar's martyrdom created a problem for Mu'awiyah because many people in his army did remember the aforesaid saying of the Prophet, and they realised that 'Ammar, by his death, had shown that Mu'awiyah and his army were rebellious and not on the right path. To pacify the army, Mu'awiyah said that it was 'Ali who had caused the death of 'Ammar by bringing him to the battlefield. When Amirul mu'minin 'Ali was informed of this ruse of Mu'awiyah, he said, “Then it was the Prophet himself who killed Hamzah by bringing him to the battlefield of Uhud!”⁴³

iv. Miytham al-Tammar

Miytham al-Tammar (the date-seller), son of Yahya, was a slave purchased by Imam 'Ali. But very few

people knew that he was a slave because 'Ali emancipated him and he became one of the closest friends of his ex-master. He is counted as one of his *hawariyyun*. It means “disciple” as in the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Imam 'Ali had taught him the secret knowledge of Allah, and gave him insight into future events. He knew the details of death, of sufferings of future, which sometimes he described and people laughed at him; but the later events always proved him right.

When 'Ali purchased him, he was called Salim. 'Ali told him that he had heard from the Prophet that “your father in Persia called you Miytham”. Miytham was astonished to hear it as nobody in Arabia knew his original name. Then 'Ali told him to keep his original name; thus he became Miytham again, and adopted the agnomen, Abu Salim.[44](#)

Miytham was a very pious man. It is written that, “...he, may Allah have mercy upon him, was one of those who were very pious, and his skin had dried upon his body [because of fasting and continuous prayers].”

Abu Khalid al-Tammar says that once on a Friday they were sailing in a boat in Euphrates, when water became very stormy. Miytham looked up and told them to put anchor and secure the boat as the storm was to become more violent. Then he said that Mu'awiyah had died just then. The people noted down the date, which afterwards proved correct.[45](#)

Shaykh Kashshi narrates that one day Miytham al-Tammar was passing by a group from the tribe of Asad, when Habib bin Muzahir came there. They stood talking to each other. Habib said, “It is as though I am looking at an old man (whose head is bald and who has a big stomach, and sells dates and water-melons) that he has been captured and his enemies have crucified him because of his love for and devotion to the family of the Prophet; then they have pierced his stomach.” All the characteristics were those of Miytham.

Miytham replied that, “I too am looking at a man (whose face is reddish) who will come to help the son of the Prophet and will be martyred and his head will be brought to Kufah.” He meant Habib bin Muzahir.

Then they went their separate ways. The people who heard this conversation said that they had not seen any one more liar than those two. Just then Rushayd al-Hujri (who also was amongst the closest friends of Imam 'Ali and was given the knowledge of future events) came there and asked whether they had seen Habib and Miytham. The people repeated the conversation derisively. Rushayd said, “May Allah have mercy upon Miytham! He forgot to tell that the man who would bring the head of that red-faced man¹ would get hundred *dirham* more than the others in reward.”

When Rushayd went away, the people said that he was bigger liar than those two.[46](#) Shortly afterwards all the prophecies were fulfilled exactly: Miytham was crucified, Habib was martyred in Karbala, and the man who brought Habib's head to Kufah was given hundred *dirhams* more.

Amirul mu'minin 'Ali had told Miytham that, “You will be captured after me and they will crucify you, and will pierce you with a spear; on the third day blood will ooze out from your nose and mouth and your beard will become red with your own blood. You should wait for that hair-dye. They will crucify you at the door of 'Amr bin Hurayth with nine others; and your cross will be the shortest, but your honour in the presence of Allah will be the highest. Come with me; I will show you the tree upon which you are to be crucified.” Then he showed Miytham that tree.[47](#)

Another tradition says that 'Ali bin Abi Talib asked Miytham, “What will be your position when the bastard of Bani Umayyah [i.e., 'Ubaydullah bin Ziyad] will compel you to curse me and to abuse me?” Miytham said, “By Allah, I will never do so.” 'Ali said, “By Allah, then they will kill and crucify you.” Miytham said that he would bear those tyrannies; and that such sufferings were nothing in the way of Allah. Then 'Ali gave him the good tiding: “O Miytham you will be with me in the hereafter in my grade.”[48](#)

After the martyrdom of 'Ali, Miytham used to go and pray near the tree. He used to say, “May Allah bless thee, O tree; I have been created for thee, and thou art growing for me.” Whenever he met 'Amr bin Hurayth, he would say to him, “When I come into your neighbourhood, you should remember my right as a neighbour.”[49](#)

In 60 AH Miytham went for *'umrah* (the minor pilgrimage). In Medina, he visited the house of Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife. When he introduced himself, Umm Salamah said, “By Allah, many were the times when I heard the Holy Prophet mentioning and recommending you to 'Ali bin Abi Talib in the heart of night”. Miytham learnt that Imam Husayn had gone outside Medina to one of his gardens. Miytham was in hurry so he told Umm Salamah to convey his greetings to Imam Husayn and tell him that very soon “we will meet in the presence of Allah”.

Umm Salamah told her maid to rub perfume onto the beard of Miytham. Rubbing perfume on the beard was a mark of high respect in Arabia. After that, Miytham said, “O Mother of the Faithfuls, you have put perfume on my beard; but very soon it will be dyed in my blood in the love for and devotion to you, the Ahlul Bayt.” Umm Salamah said that Imam Husayn remembered him very much. Miytham said, “I too always remember him; but I am in a hurry, and there is a fate waiting for me and him both; and we both will reach it.”

On coming out he met 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas and told him to ask whatever he wanted to know from the interpretation of the Qur'an, as “I have read the Qur'an from Amirul mu'minin and I know both its revelation (*tanzil*) and interpretation (*ta'wil*).” Ibn 'Abbas called for paper and ink-pot and started writing Miytham's dictation. That a man like 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas did not frown from writing his dictation shows the high respect of Miytham in the learned circle of the Muslim community.[50](#)

Then Miytham said, “What will be your feeling, O Ibn 'Abbas, when you will see me martyred with nine others?” Hearing this Ibn 'Abbas started tearing the paper, saying that Miytham had become a sorcerer. Miytham said, “Do not tear that paper. If you see that what I have said does not happen, then you will

have plenty of time to tear that paper.[51](#)

After the *'umrah*, he returned to Kufah. During his absence, 'Ubaydullah bin Ziyad was made governor of Kufah. One day he asked the *mu'arrif* (a local informer) of Kufah about Miytham. On being informed that Miytham has gone to *'umrah*, he told the *mu'arrif* that if he failed to produce Miytham he would be killed in his place. So the *mu'arrif* went to Qadisiyyah to wait for Miytham. On reaching Qadisiyyah, Miytham was captured and brought before Ibn Ziyad. The people told Ibn Ziyad that Miytham was the nearest of all to 'Ali bin Abi Talib. Ibn Ziyad was astonished: "Was 'Ali trusting this *'ajami* (a non-Arab) so much?" Then the following conversation took place: Ibn Ziyad: "Where is your protector?"

Miytham: "He is waiting for the tyrants, and you are one of them."

Ibn Ziyad: "Do you dare to speak like this before me? Now there is only one way to save your life: you must curse Abu Turab."

Miytham: "I do not know who Abu Turab is."

Ibn Ziyad: "Abuse and curse 'Ali bin Abi Talib."

Miytham: "What will you do if I refuse?"

Ibn Ziyad: "By Allah, I will kill you."

Miytham: "My master [i.e., 'Ali] had informed me that you would kill and martyr me, together with nine others, at the door of 'Amr bin Hurayth."

Ibn Ziyad: "I will not do so, thus proving your master a liar."

Miytham: "My master did not say any lie. Whatever he said, he had heard it from the holy Prophet, who had heard it from Jibra'il, who had heard it from Allah. How, therefore, can you prove them wrong? Not only this, I even know how you will kill me and where you will martyr me. And I know that I will be the first man in Islam who will be reined in the mouth to prevent me from speaking and the first man whose tongue will be cut out".

Ibn Ziyad imprisoned Miytham and Mukhtar bin Abu 'Ubaydah al-Thaqafi. Miytham informed Mukhtar that he would be freed from the prison and that he would avenge the blood of Imam Husayn and would kill this man (i.e., Ibn Ziyad). And it happened that when Mukhtar was taken out to be killed, a messenger came from Yazid with an order to release Mukhtar.

Then Miytham was taken out and crucified on a tree at the door of 'Amr bin Hurayth. Now 'Amr understood what Miytham meant by his request; and so, he ordered his maid to burn incense at his cross and clean the earth beneath him.

Miytham turned the cross into pulpit. He started narrating the traditions of the holy Prophet extolling the

virtues and superiority of the Ahlul Bayt, and also the traditions concerning the wickedness of Banu Umayyah and their being cursed in the Qur'an and *hadith*; and how they would be destroyed at last. Ibn Ziyad was informed of this unflinching courage and self-sacrificing spirit of Miytham. He feared lest Miytham's lectures turn the masses against the Umayyads and humiliate them in the eyes of the public. So he ordered that a rein be put into Miytham's mouth to prevent him from speaking. After sometime, his tongue was cut off.

On the third day, someone wounded him with a spear saying, "I am wounding you though I know that you always fasted during the day and stood the whole night in prayers." In the evening blood came oozing out from his nose and mouth, reddening his face and chest, and he left this world. He was martyred in the cause of Islam, ten days before the arrival of Imam Husayn in Karbala. It means that he died on 21st or 22nd Dhu'l hijjah, 60 AH. At night seven date-sellers secretly took away his body and buried him on the bank of a canal and erased the signs of the grave.[52](#)

Later on when there was no danger, the grave was shown to the public. Now there is a big shrine upon it where the devotees go for pilgrimage.

One of the graces of Allah upon Miytham was that knowledge and piety remained in his progeny, generation after generation. His sons, grandsons and great-grandsons were among the respected companions of the Shi'ite Imams. Miytham had six sons: Muhammad, Shu'ayb, Salih, 'Ali, 'Imran and Hamzah. All of them were among the companions of the fourth, fifth and sixth Imams.

Among his grandsons, Isma'il, Ya'qub and Ibrahim (all sons of Shu'ayb) were companions of the fifth, sixth and seventh Imams. 'Ali bin Isma'il bin Shu'ayb bin Miytham is counted among the most prominent theologians of Shi'ism. His discussions with his adversaries show his knowledge, intelligence and presence of mind. Moreover, we find many other names in the progeny of Miytham mentioned in the books of traditions and biographies (*rijal*).

[v. Bilal al-Habashi](#)

Bilal al-Habashi (the Ethiopian) was the first *mu'azzin* of the Prophet. His father was called Riyah, and his mother Jumanah; his agnomen was Abu 'Abdillah and Abu 'Umar. He was from those who accepted Islam in the very beginning. He participated in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and other battles.[53](#)

Bilal was at first a slave of Safwan bin Umayyah. During his slavery, he was tortured inhumanely because of his faith. He was made to lie down naked on the burning sand of the Arabian desert; a heavy stone was put on his chest which made breathing difficult for him. And as if it was not enough, some heavily built persons used to jump upon the stone, trying to crush him to death. Still the only sound heard from Bilal was "Ahad! Ahad! (One God! One God!).[54](#)

Seeing such barbarism meted out to Bilal, the Prophet was very much grieved. Abu Bakr purchased and

emancipated him. In the 2nd year AH when the *adhan* (the call to the prayers) was prescribed, Bilal was given the honour to call *adhan*.⁵⁵ Later on, some people suggested that this honour should be given to someone else, because Bilal could not pronounce the Arabic letter *shin* properly. The Prophet said, “The *sin* of Bilal is *shin* in the hearing of God.” Allah does not see the physical manifestation; He appreciates the purity of heart.

Once Bilal came to the holy Prophet and recited some lines of poetry in his own language in the praise of the Prophet. The Prophet asked Hassan bin Thabit al-Ansari to translate it into Arabic. Hassan said:

When noble traits are described in our country,

thou art pointed out as a model among us.

It is a well-known fact that the Prophet had an admirable sense of humour – although even in witticism, he never spoke but truth. Once an old lady of Medina asked him to pray to Allah to give her a place in the Paradise. The Prophet said, “Old women would not enter the Paradise.” She went out crying. Bilal saw her and asked her why she was crying. She narrated the whole episode. Bilal came with the lady to the Prophet, and said, “This woman is narrating such and such from you?”

The Prophet said, “Even black men would not enter the Paradise.” Now Bilal too started crying. Then 'Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet reached there and learning of the episode, tried to intercede with the Prophet, who told him that even old men would not enter the Paradise. When he too joined the crying group, the Prophet told them to be cheerful because Allah would create them young and with bright faces and then they would go into Paradise.⁵⁶

Bilal was devoted to the Ahlul Bayt. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is recorded as having said, “May God bless Bilal! He loved us, the family of the Prophet, and was one of the most pious servants of Allah.”

It is written in *Kamil Baha'i* that Bilal did not say *adhan* or *iqamah* for Abu Bakr,⁵⁷ and did not pay allegiance to Abu Bakr as a caliph. Shaykh Abu Ja'far al-Tusi has narrated in *Ikhtiyar al-Rijal* a report that Bilal refused to pay allegiance to Abu Bakr; and 'Umar caught hold of his dress made of hide and said, “Is this the reward of Abu Bakr; he emancipated you and you are now refusing to pay allegiance to him?”. Bilal said, “If Abu Bakr had emancipated me for the pleasure of Allah, then let him leave me alone for Allah; and if he had emancipated me for his service, then I am ready to render him the services required. But I am not going to pay allegiance to a person whom the Messenger of God had not appointed as his caliph.” 'Umar then dealt harshly with him and said, “You should not remain here among us.” That is why after the Prophet's death, Bilal could not remain in Medina; and migrated to Syria.

Some of his poetry on this subject is as follows:

By Allah! I did not turn towards Abu Bakr, If Allah had not protected me, hyena would have stood on my

limbs. Allah has bestowed on me good and honoured me, Surely there is vast good with Allah. You will not find me following an innovator, Because I am not an innovator, as they are.

The author of *Isti'ab* writes, "When the Prophet died, Bilal wanted to go to Syria. Abu Bakr told him to remain in his (personal) service. Bilal said, 'If you have emancipated me for yourself, then make me a captive again; but if you had emancipated me for Allah, then let me go in the way of Allah.' Abu Bakr left him alone."⁵⁸

Bilal died in Damascus by plague in the year 18 AH or 20 AH, and was buried in Bab Saghir.⁵⁹ His grave in Damascus is visited by thousands of devoted Muslims every year.

vi. Fizzah

Fizzah al-Nubiyah (of Nuba, at present in Sudan) has also gained immortality for her devotion to Islam and her love for the Ahlul Bayt. At first, she served Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet. It was arranged by the Prophet that one day Fatimah would attend to the domestic duties while Fizzah would rest, and the following day Fizzah should work while Fatimah would rest.

After Fatimah's death, 'Ali married Fizzah to Abu Tha'labah al-Habashi. She bore him a son; and then Abu Tha'labah died. Later on Fizzah married Malik al-Ghatathani. One day Malik complained to 'Umar about Fizzah. 'Umar said, "A 'hair' from the family of Abu Talib is more learned than 'Adi."⁶⁰ ('Adi was 'Umar's tribe.)

Fizzah raised a family of her own; but her devotion to the Ahlul Bayt continued. She, on her own accord, accompanied Husayn to Karbala and shared the agonies and sufferings which the family of Imam Husayn had to endure.

Her knowledge of the holy book, the Qur'an, is renowned in the Muslim world. It is recorded that at least for the last twenty years of her life, she never uttered a single word except the Qur'an, and always talked by reciting the verses of the Qur'an. One interesting piece of conversation is given here to illustrate her unique erudition:

Abu'l Qasim al-Qushayri quotes a reliable person that once he was left behind from his caravan and was travelling alone. In the desert, he saw a woman and asked who she was. The woman recited the verse of the Qur'an:

***"And say 'salam', and soon shall they know."* (43:89)**

He realised his mistake and greeted her, and then asked, "What are you doing here?"

The woman:

***"And those whom God guides, there can be none to lead (them) astray."* (39:37)**

The man: "Are you a genie or a human-being?"

The woman:

***"O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer."*(7:31)**

The man: "Where are you coming from?"

The woman:

"They are being called from a place far distant. "(41:44)

The man: "Where are you going to?"

The woman:

***"Pilgrimage to the House (of God) is a duty men owe to God, those who can afford the journey."*(3:97)**

The man: "Since how many days have you been separated from your caravan?"

The woman:

"We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days. "(50:38)

The man: "Do you want something to eat?"

The woman:

"Nor did He give them bodies that ate no food"(21:8)

So he gave her some food. After that he told her to run quickly. She said,

"On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. "(2:286)

So he asked her to sit on the camel behind him. Came the answer:

"If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been chaos in both" (21:22).

Hearing it, he came down from the camel and requested her to ride it. When she sat on it, she recited,

"Glory be to Him who has subjected this to our use, for we could never have accomplished this by ourselves. "(43: 13)

After sometime, they reached the caravan. He asked her if she had any relative of her in that caravan.

She said,

“O Dawud! We have indeed made you a vicegerent on earth; Muhammad is not but a prophet; O Yahya take hold of the book with might; O Musa, verily I am your Lord.” (38:26, 3:144; 19:21; 20:11–12 respectively.)

He called these names, and saw four young men running towards him. Meanwhile he asked the woman what was their relationship with her. She recited,

“Wealth and sons are adornments of the life of this world.”(18:46).

At that time her sons reached them; the mother told her sons,

“O my father, engage him on wages, truly the best of men for your to employ is the man who is strong and trustworthy.”(28:26)

The sons gave him some remuneration for his trouble and service. But she thought it was not enough; so she said,

“ God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases.”(2:261)

So they increased some more.⁶¹ That person asked the sons who she was. They informed him that she was Fizzah, the servant of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet; and that since twenty years she has not spoken a signal word except the Qur'an.⁶²

vii. Qambar

Qambar's name is often mentioned in the traditions. And he has been immortalised by the poetry lines of Imam 'Ali:

When I saw an unlawful thing, I kindled a fire and called Qambar.

Someone asked Qambar who was his master. Qambar described the virtues of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib in such a lucid and impressive manner that it has been recorded by the traditionists *ad verbatim*.⁶³ As justice cannot be done to it in translation, I am leaving that oration out. I have already said how lovingly Qambar was treated by Imam 'Ali. After the Imam's death, Qambar used to relate that very seldom did he have the occasion to serve his master because Imam 'Ali used to do his work by himself: he used to wash his own clothes, even mended them himself whenever needed; he would draw water from the well for his daily use; would give them good food and decent dress but would himself eat and dress like a poor man. His oft-used phrase with them was “go easy child”.

Qambar used to say, “It was only once that he got annoyed with me. It was at the time when I showed him the money that I have 'hoarded.’ It was from my share of the income given to me by others and gifts

I had received from the members of his family. I had collected about hundred *dirhams*. When I showed him the amount, he looked angry, and what pained me most, he looked sad.” Qambar inquired why he was so sad. He replied, “Qambar, if you had no use of the money, were there no people around you who needed the money? Some of them might have been starving; others might have been ill and infirm. Could you not have helped them? I never thought you could be so heartless, and could love wealth for the sake of wealth. Qambar, I am afraid you are not trying to acquire much from Islam; try more seriously and sincerely. Take the coins out of my house.” Qambar immediately distributed the money amongst the poor and the needy. It might be added that Qambar had long been freed by Imam 'Ali, but he remained with him.

Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi, the governor of 'Abdul Malik bin Marwan in Iraq, was a tyrant who used to boast that, “The most tasteful thing to me in the world is shedding the blood.” His name has become a proverb in tyranny. He killed 120,000 people whose only crime was their love for and devotion to 'Ali bin Abi Talib and the Ahlul Bayt. This number does not include those who were killed by him in the battles. He tried very hard to eliminate the Shi'ahs of 'Ali from Iraq. Sa'id bin Jubayr and Kumayl bin Ziyad were two of his victims.

Once Hajjaj asked, “Is there anybody left from the followers of Abu Turab [i.e., 'Ali] so that I may please Allah by killing him?” He was told that there was Qambar, his slave.

So Qambar, then a very old man, was captured and brought to him. Then the following talk took place between Hajjaj and Qambar:

Hajjaj: “Are you the slave of 'Ali?”

Qambar: “Allah is my Master and 'Ali is my benefactor.”

Hajjaj: “What was your duty in the service of 'Ali.”

Qambar: “I used to bring water for his ablution (*wuzu*).”

Hajjaj: “What was 'Ali reciting after finishing the *wuzu* ?”

Qambar: “He used to recite this verse:

'And when they forgot that which they had been admonished, He opened for them the door of all things (of enjoyment); until when they rejoiced in what they were given, We caught them suddenly, when, lo! they were in utter despair. [6:44]”

Hajjaj: “I suppose he meant us to be included in this verse?”

Qambar: “Yes.”

Hajjaj: “You better leave the religion of 'Ali.”

Qambar: “Before I leave his religion, tell me which religion is better than his.”

Hajjaj: “What will you do if I cut your head?”

Qambar: “Then it will be good luck for me and bad luck for you.”

In another tradition, this last question and answer have been recorded differently:

Hajjaj: “I surely intend to kill you. You better choose your own method of death.”

Qambar: “It is up to you. Kill me in whatever way you like, because I kill you in the same way on the day of judgement. And, as a matter of fact, my master had told me that you would behead me.”

Hajjaj ordered him to be beheaded. Qambar was martyred in the cause of his faith. Today his grave in Baghdad is the place of pilgrimage for thousands of pilgrims.[64](#)

viii. Sa'id

Sa'id, another slave of 'Ali bin Abi Talib, says that once on a very hot day, 'Ali was very busy writing letters. He wanted to send Sa'id to call some of his officers. He called him once, twice and thrice, and each time Sa'id purposely kept silent and did not reply. The Imam then got up himself and saw Sa'id sitting not very far. He asked him why he did not respond to his call. Sa'id replied, “Sir, I wanted to find out when and how you would get angry.” A smile appeared on 'Ali's lips and he told Sa'id that he could not rouse him to anger with those childish tricks. Imam 'Ali set him free, but continued to support him till his death

ix. Slaves: The Helpers of The Faith

As the Prophet of Islam brought the message of universal brotherhood, it was inevitable that this message of emancipation of the human soul should have attracted the people of all races and creeds; but especially the oppressed groups. It was natural that the larger part of his early followers was made up of the slaves.

The reactionaries were horrified; in desperation, they began persecuting the newly-converted Muslims. Apart from those whose descriptions have already been given above, the following names deserve particular attention:

Suhayb bin Sinan

Suhayb bin Sinan of Rome was a slave converted to Islam in its early days.[65](#) He was a skilled iron-smith, making fine coats of mail and swords. Thus, he accumulated a good fortune. After his conversion to Islam, he was also brutally tortured by the infidels.[66](#) When he wanted to migrate to Medina, the

infidels pounced upon him and took every single *dirham* from his possession. Thus he arrived at Medina a destitute. He was entrusted by 'Umar, the second caliph, to lead people in prayers after his death till the next caliph was appointed.[67](#)

Khabbab bin al-Arratt

Khabbab bin al-Arratt was a famous companion of the Prophet. He was the sixth man to accept Islam. He was from the continent of Africa; and suffered for the cause of truth.[68](#) He was among those who were known as “Shi'ahs (partisans) of 'Ali.” His son, 'Abdullah together with all his family-members, was martyred by the Kharijites in 40 AH.[69](#)

The greatest sacrifice in the cause of Islam was offered in Karbala in 61 AH by Imam Husayn and his companions. A group of about 120 souls faced the host of Yazid bin Mu'awiyah's army (not less than 30,000 in number). It is noteworthy that in that God-loving, God-fearing group of 120 believers, about 16 were slaves or ex-slaves. They were as follows:

Shawdhab

Shawdhab, an African martyr; was one of the most respected scholars of Islamic laws and traditions. People used to travel from far to listen to his discourses.[70](#) On hearing Husayn's plight, Shawdhab and his ex-master (and now companion) 'Abis Shakiri joined him and fell on the battlefield of Karbala.

John bin Huwai

John bin Huwai, of Ethiopia, was probably a convert from Christianity as his name suggests. He was a slave of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, the famous companion of the Prophet. After the death of Abu Dharr, he attached himself to the Ahlul Bayt who were looking after him. He accompanied Imam Husayn to Karbala, and although by this time an old man he tried to go to the battle-field to fight. Imam Husayn at first refused; but John persisted and, at last, the Imam allowed him to go to the battlefield. When he fell down, Imam Husayn went to his corpse, put his head on his lap, and asked God to illuminate the face of John. When people of the tribe of Asad came after three days to bury the martyrs, they were astonished to find a corpse which was shining with heavenly light and enveloped in heavenly perfume. It was John's corpse.

Salim, Zahir bin 'Amr, Qarib bin 'Abdullah Du'ali, Munjih bin Sahm, Sa'd bin Harth, Nasr bin Abi Naizar, Aslam bin 'Amr and Sulayman

Salim, Zahir bin 'Amr, Qarib bin 'Abdullah Du'ali, Munjih bin Sahm, Sa'd bin Harth, Nasr bin Abi Naizar, Aslam bin 'Amr and Sulayman were among the victims of the “first attack” – an attempt made by the cavalry of Yazid to wipe out the little group of Husayn by overwhelming them with a powerful, fast and

surprise attack. The Yazidites failed in their attempt because of the superiority of the defence technique of the Husaynites and their fierce devotion to him. The cavalry of Yazid retreated, leaving behind a large number of dead.

But this victory was won by the followers of Imam Husayn with a heavy price. More than fifty companions of Husayn were lying on the battle-field; among them were the six above-mentioned brave slave martyrs. There were six other slaves who were martyred in Karbala. Their names are: Harth bin Nabhan, Sa'id, Nafi', Salim, Shabib and Wadih. Description is also found in histories of a Turkish slave of Imam Zaynul 'Abidin who fought the army of Yazid and gave his life in the cause of Islam.[71](#)

Aqabah bin Sam'an

'Aqabah bin Sam'an, also a slave, was one of the most trusted companions of Imam Husayn. The Imam left all his important documents in his custody. In modern terminology, we may say that he was a secretary of Imam Husayn. He was wounded in the battle of Karbala and taken prisoner along with Imam Husayn's family. Being one of the eye-witnesses of the massacre of Karbala, 'Aqabah bin Sam'an's chronicle is a valuable source of history. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the famous Muslim historian, has recorded 'Aqabah's chronicle in his *Ta'rikh al-umam wa al-muluk*. That chronicle was separated from al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh* and published in India with the notes by late Mujtaba Husayn Kamunpuri of Aligarh Muslim University.

Muslims have always been proud of the sacrifices offered by the martyrs of Karbala for the cause of Islam. The descendants of Imam Husayn always offered their salutations to them, sometimes name by name, sometimes jointly. The Shi'ah Ithna 'Asharis, following their Imams, always salute these martyrs in the following term, almost every day:-

Salutation to you, O saints of Allah and His beloved ones; Salutations to you, O chosen ones of Allah and His dear ones; Salutations to you, O helpers of the Faith; May my parents have the privilege of laying down their lives for you, Pure and clean were you, and pure and clean became the earth in which you were buried; you have indeed achieved the greatest success; I wish to Allah that I were there with you to share the success.[72](#)

x. Slaves' Children: Imams and Caliphs

From its advent until the rise of the Umayyads, Islam had achieved a marked degree of success in its benign war against slavery. Slaves were no longer sub-human animals, but men and women of dignity and respect. Many a freed slave rose to high ranks. The descendants of the Prophet and their followers continued the Islamic attitude towards slavery. A number of Imams married slave-women who became mothers of Imams.

The Kaysaniyyah sect believed Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah (a son of Imam 'Ali) to be the Imam after

Imam Husayn. Muhammad al-Hanafiyah's mother Khawla bint Ja'far bin Qays was a captive whom 'Ali married. But nobody ever suggested that being born of a captive girl was a snag in the belief of the Kaysaniyyah.

Likewise, Zaydiyyah sect believes that the Imam, after Imam Zaynul 'Abidin, was his son Zayd who was born of a Sindhi slave-girl, named Huriya.

Even Shahr Banu, daughter of Yazd Jurd (the last emperor of Iran) who was married to Imam Husayn and was mother of Imam Zaynul 'Abidin, had come to Arabia as a captive. Still her personal virtues earned her the title of "chief of the ladies".

Hamidah Khatun, mother of Imam Musa al-Kazim was a slave-girl from Berber. She is renowned for her knowledge and piety. She was called Hamidah the Pure. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq used to send the women to learn the tenets of religion from her and used to say that "Hamidah is pure from every impurity like the ingot of pure gold."

The mother of Imam 'Ali al-Riza also was a slave-girl from Maghrib (North-West Africa). Her name was Taktum (or Najma) and she was known as Tahirah, the purified one. She was renowned for her piety and knowledge.

Imam Muhammad al-Taqi was son of Sabikah, commonly known as Khayzuran, a slave-girl from Nuba. Imam Musa al-Kazim had told Yazid bin Sabt to convey his *salams* to Sabikah. She is referred to in the traditions as Tayyibah.

Imam 'Ali al-Naqi's mother, Sammanah, of Maghrib, was a slave, but she was called "Sayyidah" (chief of the ladies). She had no equal in piety, and love and fear of Allah. She fasted nearly the whole year. Imam 'Ali al-Naqi told her that she was protected by Allah and was foremost amongst the mothers of *siddiqin* and *salihin* – the truthful and virtuous people.

Imam Hasan al-'Askari was also born of a slave-girl, Hodayth (or Salil). To show her high prestige among the Shi'ahs, it is enough to say that after the death of Imam Hasan al-'Askari she was the central figure of Shi'ism around whom the whole community gathered and she guided them in the best possible way. The Shi'ahs referred to her as "Jaddah", the grandmother.

Narjis Khatun, the mother of our 12th and present Imam, was a princess of the Byzantine empire. But she also had reached to Imam Hasan al-'Askari as a slave.

This much will suffice on the spiritual side. Coming to the politics, we see countless slaves in highest responsible posts, including the command of armies, governorship and judgeship. Not only in administration, we find theologians, commentators of the Qur'an, traditionists, jurists and authors who either were slaves or the children of the slaves or ex-slaves.

Except for the first, third, fourth and fifth caliphs, all the 'Abbasid caliphs were born from slave women, the famous al-Mansur (the 2nd caliph) being the first of them whose mother, Salamah, was a slave from Berber. Then beginning from Ma'mun al-Rashid (the 6th caliph) up to the last all were sons of slave-girls.

Here are the names of those caliphs and of their slave mothers:

1. Ma'mun al-Rashid: Murajil, a black slave-girl.
2. Mu'tasim Billah: a slave-girl from Kufah, named Maridah.
3. Wathiq Billah: a Roman named Qaratis.
4. Mutawakkil 'Alallah: son of Shuja.
5. Muntasir Billah: a Roman named Habashiyyah.
6. Musta'in Billah: Mukhariq.
7. Mu'tazz Billah: a Roman named Qabihah.
8. Muhtadi Billah: Wards, or Qurb.
9. Mu'tamid 'Alallah: a Roman named Fityan.
10. Mu'tazid Billah: Sawab (or Hirz or Dhirar).
11. Muktafi Billah: a Turkish slave-girl named Jijaq or Khudi.
12. Muqtadir Billah: a Roman or Turkish slave-girl called Gharib or Shaghab.
13. Qahir Billah: Fitnah.
14. Radhi Billah: a Roman, Zalum.
15. Muttaqi Lillah: Khalub or Zuhra.
16. Mustakfi Billah: Awjahun Naa or Ghusn.
17. Muti' Lillah: Mash'alah.
18. Atta'i Lillah: Hazar or Atab.
19. Qadir Billah: Dumanah or Tamanni.
20. Qa'im Billah: an Armenian called Badrudduja or Qatrunnada.

21. Muqtadi Bi Amrillah: Arjwan.
22. Mustazhir Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
23. Mustarshid Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
24. Rashid Billah: a slave (name not recorded).
25. Muqtafi Li Amrillah: an Ethiopian slave–girl.
26. Mustanjid Billah: a Karjiyya slave named Ta'us.
27. Mustadi' Bi Amrillah: an Armenian named Ghaddha.
28. Nasir Li Dinillah: a Turkish slave, Zamurrad.
29. Zahir Bi Amrillah~: Name not recorded.
30. Munstansir Billah: a Turkish slave (name not recorded).
31. Musta'sim Billah: Hajir. [73](#)

Even as late as the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the royal family may rightly be included in the slave–family because the mothers of the Sultan's children were slaves. The Sultan himself was a son of a slave. Long before Sulayman's time, the Sultan had practically ceased either to obtain a bride of royal ranks or give title of wife to the mothers of their children. The Ottoman system deliberately took slaves and made them ministers of state. It took boys from the sheep–run and the plough tail and made them courtiers and the husbands of princesses, it took young men of land whose ancestors had borne the christian names for centuries, and made them rulers in the greatest of Muslim states.

Throughout the Muslim history, we find slaves rising not only to administrative posts but to the kingship as well. In the words of Will Durant, “It is astonishing how many sons of slaves rose to high place in the intellectual and political world of Islam, how many, like Mahmud and the early Mameluks, became kings.”[74](#) Subuktagin of Ghazni and his son, Mahmud (the famous warrior king who attacked India seventeen times), were slaves and son of slave respectively. The first Muslim dynasty of India was also found by slaves, and is still known as the slave dynasty.

Before closing this chapter, I must emphasise one point: All those slaves or children of slaves who reached the height of prestige spiritually or politically – did so *neither because of nor in spite of* being slaves or children of slaves; they reached there because they were Muslims who had abilities. Their status of slavery or ex–slavery neither enhanced nor decreased the chances of their success; it neither facilitated nor hindered their pursuit to reach their goal of life. Muslim society, thanks to the strict injunctions of Islam and Prophet Muhammad, was colour–blind and status–blind. The only thing that mattered was the ability which a man or woman had.

This achievement, effected 1400 years ago, is a far cry from the blatant failure of Christianity in this 1960's where, in Christian U.S.A. if a Negro becomes a mayor it is considered a big news; and where in 1971 the Government planned to promote its first black admiral, a certain Captain Samuel Lee Gravely.

You see the implication of this news. Someone from the Negroes is to be selected on political grounds *because* he is a Negro. Had it been solely on his personal records, the name would not have been a matter of speculation! Such kind of racialism and snobbery was, and still is, unthinkable in Islam. Thus, it is clear that Islam succeeded where every other religion and system has failed so far. Islam absorbed the slaves in Muslim society without any regard of their colour or origin. Judging on its own records, we cannot but admire the tremendous success of Islam in this field.

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2. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 58.
3. al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar; vol. 22 (Tehran, n.d.), p. 355; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 193-5; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, al-Isabah fi Tamyiz's-Sahabah, vol. 3 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1853-88), p. 224.
4. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. II:1, p.47.
5. al-Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 20, pp. 189, 198; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 59, vol. VII:2, p. 65.
6. al-Majlisi, Bihar; vol. 22, p. 348.
7. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, pp. 330, 391; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 61; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 187.
8. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 331.
9. Ibid, p. 349.
10. Ibid, p. 346.
11. Ibid, p. 327, 349.
12. Ibid, p. 347.
13. Ibid, p. 319; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. IV:1, p. 61; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 187.
14. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 342.
15. Ibid, p. 321.
16. Ibid, p. 325; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 190.
17. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 327.
18. Ibid, p. 381.
19. Ibid, p. 374.
20. Ibid, pp. 372, 380.
21. Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 45.
22. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, pp. 314, 318; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol.III:1, p. 28; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 45-6.
23. al-Majlisi, op. cit.; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III, p. 29; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 600.
24. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. 8, p. 31; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 46, vol. 7, p. 600.
25. al-Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, 3rd ed., vol. 4 (Beirut: 1974), p. 195.
26. al-'Amili, op. cit., vol. 14, p. 43; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. VIII:1, p. 71.
27. See the Qur'an 2:221
28. al-Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 187; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 600.
29. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III: 1, p. 32; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 47.
30. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. II:2, pp. 41-2; vol. IV:1, pp.46-7.
31. Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 179; Ibn Athir, Usdu '1-Ghabah fi Ma'rifati's-Sahabah, vol. 4 (Egypt, n.d.), p. 461; Ibn Kathir, al-Tar'ikh, vol. 7 (Egypt, n.d.), p. 311.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid, vol, III:1, p. 176.

- [34.](#) Ibid, vol. III:1, p. 177; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 140.
- [35.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 178; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 140; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol.3, p. 1219.
- [36.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 178; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1220.
- [37.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 177, 180; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1220; al-Bukhari, al-Sahih, vol. 8 (Egypt ed.) pp. 185–186; al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami' al-Sahih, vol. 5 (Egypt ed.) p. 669; Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Musnad, vol. 2 (Egypt ed.) pp. 161, 164, 206, vol. 3, pp. 5, 22, 28, 91, vol. 4, pp. 197, 199, vol. 5, pp. 215, 306, 307, vol. 6, pp. 289, 300, 311, 315; Ibn 'Abdi '1-Barr, al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifat'l-Ashab, vol. 3, p. 1140.
- [38.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 187; Hakim, al-Mustadrak 'ala 's-Sahihayn, vol. 3 (Hyderabad ed.) p. 392; Ibn Hisham, al-Sirah, vol.2 (Egypt ed., n.d.) p. 143; Ibn Kathir, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 7, pp. 268, 270.
- [39.](#) Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 139; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1219; Ibn Majah, al-Sunan, vol. 1 (Egypt ed. n.d.) p. 65; al-Haythami, Majma' al-Zawa'id, vol. 9 (Egypt ed. n.d.) p. 295; Ibn 'Abdu'1-Barr, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 1137.
- [40.](#) al-Baladhuri, Ansabu'l Ashraf, vol. 5, pp. 48, 54, 88; Ibn Abi '1-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 3, p. 47; Ibn Qutaybah, al-Imamah wa 's-Siyasah, vol. 1, pp. 35–6; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-'Iqdu 'l-Farid, vol. 4 (Egypt ed.) p. 307; Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 185; al-Diyarbakri; Tarikhu'l-Khamis, vol. 2, p. 271.
- [41.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 184–5; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol.1, p.141.
- [42.](#) Qummi, 'Abbas, Muntaha'l-Amal, vol. 1 (Tehran: 1381 AH) p. 92.
- [43.](#) al-Tabari, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 1, pp. 3316–3322; vol. 3, pp. 2314–2319; Ibn Athir, al-Kamil, vol. 3, pp. 308–312; Ibn Kathir, al-Ta'rikh, vol. 7, pp. 267–272.
- [44.](#) al-Mufid, Kitab al-Irshad, trans. I.K.A. Howard (London: Muhammadi Trust) pp. 243–244; and al-Kashshi's Rijal as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157.
- [45.](#) Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157.
- [46.](#) Kashshi, Rijal, as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 143–4.
- [47.](#) Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157; al-Mufid, op. cit., p. 244.
- [48.](#) Ibid.
- [49.](#) Ibid.
- [50.](#) Ibid.
- [51.](#) Ibid.
- [52.](#) Ibid, pp. 158–9.
- [53.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III: 1, p. 170; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 336.
- [54.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 166; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 148; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 336.
- [55.](#) Ibid, p. 167.
- [56.](#) al-Majlisi, Hayatu'l Qulub, pp. 129–130; Bihar, vol. 16, p. 295.
- [57.](#) Shustari, Nurullah, Majalisu'1-Mu'minin (Tehran, 1268 AH) p. 54; and also see Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 169.
- [58.](#) Shushtari, op. cit.; also see Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 150.
- [59.](#) Shushtari, op. cit., p. 54; and also see Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p.170; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol.1, pp.336–337.
- [60.](#) Shubbar, S. 'Abdullah, Masabihul Anwar, vol. 2 (Najaf: Matba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1952/1371) p. 425–6 quoting Manaqib of Ibn Shahr Ashub.
- [61.](#) These sons were most probably from Fizzah's second husband, Malik al-Ghatathani
- [62.](#) Shubbar, S. 'Abdullah, Masabihul Anwar, vol. 2 (Najaf: Matba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1952/1371) p. 425–6 quoting Manaqib of Ibn Shahr Ashub.
- [63.](#) Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 43 (Beirut, 1983/1403) p. 86–7; Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib Aal Abi Talib, vol. 4 (Bombay, 1313 AH) p. 15.
- [64.](#) Kashshi, Rijal as quoted by Qummi, op. cit., vol.1, p. 153.
- [65.](#) Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 514.
- [66.](#) Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 514.
- [67.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, pp. 161–4; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 516.
- [68.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 116–7; Abu Na'im, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 144.
- [69.](#) Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., vol. III:1, p. 21; Ibn Hajar, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 739.

[70.](#) Qummi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 266.

[71.](#) For more information on Imam Husayn and Karbala, see Rizvi, S.M., ed., Imam Husayn, the Saviour of Islam, (Vancouver: 1984).

[72.](#) Qummi, Mafatihul-Jinan (Tehran, n.d.) p. 427.

[73.](#) See relevant chapters of Muhammad Khawind Shah's Rawdatu 's-Safa; also Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Undulusi, al-'Iqdu'l-Farid, vol. 5 (Beirut: 1983) pp. 113–131.

[74.](#) Durant, W., The Story of Civilization, vol. 4, p. 209.

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