

The Arba'in

It is customary to pay tribute to the deceased forty days after his death by doing acts of righteousness on his behalf, by eulogizing him and enumerating his merits. This is done at organized gatherings in order to keep his memory alive just when people's minds start to forget about him and their hearts start to ignore him.

An immortal portrayal is brought back to such minds through the medium of well composed poetry transmitted from one person to another, one which takes its place in people's hearts. Epochs, hence, pass by, and so do years, while his memory remains fresh and alive.

Or maybe someone delivers a moving speech recorded in books and in other records, so it would become an enduring part of history. The lost one remains alive whenever such poetry is recited, or whenever a researcher comes across what was said in his eulogies recorded in books, so he develops an interest in investigating him and in getting to know his merits and feats.

Such a commendable custom becomes more significant as the greatness of the lost one increases and is proportionate with his feats. Such is the case with reformers and role models emulated by others. This is more important because disseminating their merits and teachings calls for following them and walking on their footprints to effect reform and to cultivate the souls.

Both Abu Tharr al-Ghifari and Ibn 'Abbas quote the Prophet (S) as saying, "The earth mourns the death of a believer for forty mornings."¹ Zurarah quotes Abu 'Abdullah Imam as-Sadiq ('a) saying, "The sky wept over al-Husayn ('a) for forty mornings with blood, while the earth wept over him for forty mornings with blackness. The sun wept over him for forty mornings with the eclipse and with redness, whereas the angels wept over him for forty mornings.

No woman among us ever dyed with *henna*, nor used any oil or any *kohl* nor cohabited with her husband till the head of 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad was brought to us, and we are still grieving even after all of that."²

This is the basis of the ongoing custom of grieving for the deceased for forty days. On the 40th day, a special mourning ceremony is held at his gravesite attended by his relatives and friends. This custom is not confined to Muslims.

Christians hold mourning ceremonies forty days after the death of their lost one. They gather at a church and repeat a special prayer that they call a funeral prayer service. They do likewise six months after his death and then one year after his death. Jews renew their mourning service thirty days after one's death, nine months after one's death, and one year after one's death.³

All of this is done in order to keep his memory alive and so that people may not forget his legacy and deeds if he is great with merits and feats.

At any rate, a researcher does not find in the band described as reformers a man so well shrouded in feats of the most sublime meanings, one whose life, uprising, and the tragic way in which he was killed, a divine call and lessons in reform, even social systems, ethics, and sacred morals..., other than the Master of the Youths of Paradise, the man who was martyred for his creed, for Islam, for harmony, the martyr for ethics and cultivation, namely al-Husayn ('a).

He, more than anyone else, deserves to be remembered on various occasions. People ought to make a pilgrimage to his sacred gravesite on the anniversary of the passage of 40 days following the date of his martyrdom so that they may achieve such lofty objectives.

The reason why most people hold only the first such an anniversary is due to the fact that the merits of those men are limited and temporal, unlike those of the Master of Martyrs: his feats are endless, his virtues are countless, the study of whose biography keeps his memory alive, and so is the case whenever he is mentioned. To follow in his footsteps is needed by every generation.

To hold an annual ceremony at his grave on the anniversary of his *Arba'in* brings his revolution back to memory. It also brings back to memory the cruelty committed by the Umayyads and their henchmen. No matter how hard an orator tries, or how well a poet presents his theme, new doors of virtue, that were closed before, will then be opened for him.

This is why it has been the custom of the Shi'as to bring back to memory on the *Arba'in* those events every year. The tradition wherein Imam al-Baqir ('a) says that the heavens wept over al-Husayn ('a) for forty mornings, rising red and setting red,⁴ hints to such a public custom.

So is the case with a statement made once by Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari ('a) wherein he said, "There are five marks of a believer: his fifty-one *rak'at* prayers, *ziyarat al-Arba'in*, audible recitation of the *basmala*, wearing his ring on the right hand, and rubbing his forehead with the dust."⁵

Such a statement leads us to the ongoing public custom being discussed. Holding a mourning ceremony

for the Master of Martyrs and holding meetings in his memory are all done by those who are loyal to him and who follow him.

There is no doubt that those who follow his path are the believers who recognize him as their Imam; so, one of the marks highlighting their *iman*, as well as their loyalty to the Master of the Youths of Paradise, the one who was killed as he stood to defend the divine Message, is to be present on the *Arba'in* anniversary at his sacred grave in order to hold a mourning ceremony for him and remember the tragedies that had befallen him, his companions and Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

To twist the meaning of *ziyarat al-Arba'in* by saying that it means visiting the gravesites of forty believers is simply indicative of twisted mentalities, an attempt at distortion, one which good taste resents. Moreover, it is without any foundation. Had the goal been to visit forty believers, the Imam ('a) would have used the term "*ziyarat Arba'in [mu'minin]*."

The original wording indicates that *ziyarat al-Arba'in* is one of the conditions enumerated in the *hadith* cited above saying that it is one of the marks of one's *iman* and an indication of his loyalty to the Twelve Imams ('a).

All the Imams who descended from the Prophet (S) were *the* gates of salvation, *the* arks of mercy. Through them can a believer be distinguished from a non-believer.

They all left this world after being killed as they stood to defend the Divine Message, accepting the possibility of their being killed for the stand which they took in obedience to the Command of their Lord, Glory to Him, the One Who sent His *wahi* to their grandfather, the Prophet (S). Father of Muhammad, al-Hasan ('a), son of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali ('a), has pointed out to this fact saying, "The mission that we undertake is assigned to Twelve Imams ('a) each one of whom is either to be killed or poisoned."

A mourning ceremony ought to be held in commemoration of the *Arba'in* of each one of them. The statement made by Imam Hasan al-'Askari ('a) does not contain any clue restricting the commemoration of the *Arba'in* to al-Husayn ('a) alone, but scholars have understood it to imply emphasis on visiting al-Husayn's gravesite in particular, since the cause defended by the Master of Martyrs ('a) is the one characterized by enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

This is why it is said that Islam started with Muhammad (S) and it stays alive through al-Husayn ('a). So is the implication of one *hadith* by the Messenger of Allah (S) saying: "Husayn is of me, and I am of Husayn."

This *hadith* conveys the same message because the hardship from which the Master of Martyrs ('a) suffered was for the sake of firming the foundations of Islam and removing the thorns of falsehood from the path of the *Shari'a*, and to warn the following generations of the crimes committed by the promoters

of misguidance. This is exactly the cause for which the Prophet of Islam (S) stood to disseminate the divine call.

For all of these reasons, the Imams from among the Prophet's Progeny ('a) found no alternative to attracting the attention to such a glorious revolution because it contains tragedies that would split the hardest of rocks. They knew that persistence in demonstrating the injustice dealt to al-Husayn ('a) would stir the emotions and attract the hearts of sympathizers.

One who hears the tales of such horrible events will come to conclude that al-Husayn ('a) was a fair and just Imam who did not succumb to lowly things, that his Imamate was inherited from his grandfather, the Prophet (S), and from his father, the *wasi* ('a), that whoever opposes him deviates from the path of equity. Whoever absorbs the fact that right was on al-Husayn's side and on that of his infallible offspring would be embracing their method and following their path.

This is why the Imams ('a) did not urge the holding of mourning ceremonies for the *Arba'in* anniversary of any of them, not even for that of the Prophet of Islam (S), so that it alone would be the memory of his tragedy that would make a strong case for safeguarding the religious link.

Turning attention to it is more effective in keeping the cause of the Infallible Ones dear to all those who discuss it: "Keep our cause alive, and discuss our cause."

The kind reader, anyway, can easily see why *ziyarat al-Arba'in* is an indication of one's *iman* when he gets to know similar indications to which the *hadith* has referred.

The first of such marks, namely the 51-*rak'at* prayers, legislated during the night of the Prophet's *mi'raj*, and which, through the Prophet's intercession, were reduced to only five during the day and the night, are: seventeen *rak'at* for the morning, the noon and the afternoon, the sunset and the evening, and the *nafl* prayers timed with them, in addition to night's *nafl* prayers: they all make up thirty-four: eight before the noon-time prayers, eight before the after-noon prayers, four after sunset prayers, and two after the evening prayers regarded as one, and two before the morning prayers, and finally eleven *rak'at* for the night's *nafl* prayers.

Add to them the *shaf'* and *witr rak'at*, and you will come to a total of obligatory and optional prayers of fifty-one *rak'at*. This is applicable only to the Shi'as.

Although they agree with the Shi'as with regard to the number of obligatory *rak'at*, the Sunnis differ when it comes to optional prayers. On p. 314, Vol. 1, of Ibn Humam al-Hanafi's book *Fath al-Qadir*, they are: two *rak'at* before the *fajr* prayers, four before the noon prayers and two after that, four before the afternoon prayers, or just two *rak'at*, two more after the sunset prayers and four thereafter, or just two, making up twenty-three *rak'at*.

They differ about the night's *nafl* prayers whether they ought to be eight, only two, or thirteen, or even more. Hence, the total of optional and compulsory *rak'at* will in no case be fifty-one; so, the fifty-one *rak'at* are relevant to Imamite Shi'as only.

The second on the list of marks referred to in the said *hadith* is the audible pronunciation of the *basmala*. Imamites seek nearness to Allah, the most Exalted One, by making it obligatory to pronounce it audibly in the audible prayers and voluntary in the inaudible ones, following the text of their Imams ('a).

In this regard, al-Fakhr al-Razi says, "Shi'as are of the view that it is a Sunnah to audibly pronounce the *basmala* in the audible prayers as well as in the inaudible ones, whereas the majority of [Sunni] *faqih*s differ from them.

It is proven through *tawatur* that 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib ('a) used to audibly pronounce the *basmala*. Anyone who follows 'Ali ('a), in as far as his creed is concerned, will surely be on the right guidance by token of the *hadith* saying: 'O Allah! Let right be with 'Ali wherever he goes'".⁶

This statement of al-Razi was not digested by Abul-Thana' al-Alusi who followed it with a comment in which he said, "Had anyone acted upon all what they claim to be *mutawatir* from the Commander of the Faithful ('a), he will surely be an apostate; so, there is no alternative to believing in some and disbelieving in others.

His claim that anyone who emulates 'Ali ('a) in as far as his creed is concerned will be on the right guidance of Islam is accepted without any discussion so long as we are sure that it is proven as having been said by 'Ali ('a). Anything else besides that is steam."⁷

Shi'as are not harmed when al-'Alusi and others assault them especially since their feet are firm on the path of loyalty for the Master of *wasis* ('a) to whom the Messenger of Allah (S) says, "O 'Ali ! Nobody knows Allah, the most Exalted One, (fully well) except I and you, and nobody knows me (fully well) except Allah and you, and nobody knows you (fully well) except Allah and I."⁸

If you, woe unto you, never heard of his merits and feats,
Then hear them from "Hal Ata," O fool,
For it should suffice you!⁹

Sunnis have opted to do the opposite with regard to such a pronouncement. On p. 478, Vol. 1, of Ibn Qudamah's book *Al-Mughni*, and also on p. 204, Vol. 1, of *Badai' al-Sanai'* by al-Kasani, and also on p. 216, Vol. 1, of al-Zarqani's *Sharh* of Abul-Diya's *Mukhtasar* of Malik's *fiqh*, audible pronouncement is not a Sunnah in prayers.

The third mark mentioned in the said *hadith*, that is, wearing a ring in the right hand, is something practiced religiously by the Shi'as on account of the traditions they quote from their Imams ('a). A multitude from among the Sunnis disagrees with them.

Ibn al-Hajjaj al-Maliki has said, "The Sunnah has recorded everything as abominable if handed by the left hand and everything *tahir* if handed by the right. In this sense, it is highly recommended to wear a ring in the left hand to be taken by the right one and then placed on the left."¹⁰

Ibn Hajar narrates saying that Malik hated to wear a ring on his right hand, believing it should be worn on the left.¹¹

Shaikh Isma'il al-Barusawi has said the following in '*Iqd al-Durr*: "Originally, it was a Sunnah to wear a ring on the right hand, but since this is the distinguishing mark of the people of *bid'as* and of injustice, it *became* a Sunnah **in our time** to place the ring on a finger on the left hand".¹²

The fourth mark mentioned in the said *hadith* is the placing of the forehead on dust [or dry soil]. Its message is to demonstrate that during the *sajda*, the forehead has to be placed on the ground. Sunnis do not place their forehead on the ground.

Abu Hanifa, Malik, and Ahmad are reported as having authorized the prostrating on turban coils,¹³ or on a piece of garment¹⁴ worn by the person performing the prayers or any piece of cloth. Hanafis have authorized placing it on the palms if one feels grudgingly that he has no other choice.¹⁵ They also permit prostrating on wheat and barley, on a bed, on the back of another person standing in front of you who is also performing the same prayers...!¹⁶

The objective behind such a reference is that it is highly commendable, when one prostrates to thank Allah, to rub his forehead on the dust as a symbol of humility and to shun arrogance. An examination of the original text will show any discreet person that it is equally commendable to rub both sides of the face on it. It is to this meaning that Sayyid Bahr al-'Ulum, may Allah sanctify him, refers in a poem wherein he says this line about *sajdat al-shukr*:

The cheek is more worthy of being rubbed,
The *hadith* clearly says so
Whereas in reference to the forehead,
It states it can be done, too.

Rubbing the cheeks exists when reference is made to *sajdat al-shukr*,¹⁷ something whereby prophet Moses son of 'Imran [Amram] ('a) deserved to be drawn closer to the Almighty whenever he addressed Him silently [during the *munajat*].¹⁸ Nobody contradicted the Imamites with regard to such rubbing, be it on the forehead or on the cheeks. Sunnis never obligate themselves to rubbing their foreheads on dust when performing their prayers or when performing *sajdat al-shukr*. This is so despite the fact that al-

Nakh'i, Malik, and Abu Hanifa have all disliked performing *sajdat al-shukr*, although the Hanbalis observe it,¹⁹ and so do the Shafi'is²⁰ whenever they receive a divine blessing or whenever a sign of Allah's wrath is removed from them.

1. al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p. 679.
2. al-Nawari, Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, p. 215, chapter 94.
3. Nahr al-Dhahab fi Tarikh Halab, Vol. 1, pp. 63 and 267.
4. Ibn Qawlawayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 90, chapter 28.
5. This is narrated by Shaikh al-Tusi on p. 17, Vol. 3, of his Tahthib, in a chapter discussing the merits of visiting the gravesite of al-Husayn ('a) wherein he quotes Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-'Askari ('a). It is also narrated on p. 551 of the Indian edition of Misbah al-Mutahajjid.
6. Mafatih al-Ghayb, Vol. 1, p. 107.
7. Ruh al-Ma'ani, Vol. 1, p. 47.
8. Al-Muhtadir, p. 165.
9. According to p. 140, Vol. 4, of Ibn al-'Imad's book Shatharat al-Thahab, a number of Hanbalis used to recite this line from the pulpits of Baghdad.
10. Al-Madkhal, Vol. 1, p. 46, in a chapter dealing with the etiquette of entering mosques.
11. Al-Fatawa al-Fiqhiyya al-Kubra, Vol. 1, p. 264, in a chapter dealing with what to wear.
12. This is narrated by the authority Shaikh 'Abd al-Husayn Ahmad al-Amini al-Najafi in his 11-volume encyclopedia titled Al-Ghadir quoting p. 142, Vol. 4, of the exegesis titled Ruh al-Bayan.

This is not the first issue wherein Sunnis practice the opposite of what the Shi'as practice. On p. 137, Vol. 1, of Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi's book Al-Muaththab, on p. 47, Vol. 1, of al-Ghazali's book Al-Wajiz, on p. 25 of al-Nawawi's Al-Minhaj as well as on p. 560, Vol. 1, of its Sharh by Ibn Hajar titled Tuhfat al-Muhtaj fi Sharh al-Minhaj, on p. 248, Vol. 4, of al-'Ayni's book 'Umdat al-Qari fi Sharh al-Bukhari, on p. 681, Vol. 1, of Ibn Muflih's book Al-Furu', and on p. 505, Vol. 2, of Ibn Qudamah's book Al-Mughni, to plane graves is looked upon as a mark of "innovators."

On p. 88, Vol. 1, of al-Sha'rani's book Rahmat al-Ummah bi Ikhtilaf al-'Aimmah, a book written as a comment on the exegesis titled Al-Mizan by 'Allama Tabatabai, the author states the following: "It is a Sunnah to plane graves. But since it became a distinguishing mark for the Rafidis, it is better to do contrariwise." Among other issues wherein Sunnis do the opposite of what the Shi'as do is blessing the Prophet (S) and his progeny ('a). Some of them suggest its elimination altogether.

For example, al-Zamakhshari states the following comment after trying to explain verse 56 of Surat al-Ahzab in his book Al-Kashshaf: "It is makruh to bless the Prophet (S) because it causes one to be charged with being a Rafidi, especially since he [the Prophet (S)] has said, 'Do not stand where you may be prone to being charged.'" The same theme exists on p. 135, Vol. 11, of Ibn Hajar's book Fath al-Bari, in "Kitab al-Da'awat" (book of supplications), where the author tries to answer the question: "Should one bless anyone else besides the Prophet (S)?"

Says he, "There is a disagreement with regard to blessing anyone besides the prophets although there is a consensus that it is permissive to greet the Living One. Some say it is permissive in its absolute application, while others say it is conditional because it has become a distinguishing mark of the Rafidis." Even in the manner of dressing do some Sunnis want to distinguish themselves from others: On p. 13, Vol. 5, of al-Zarqani's book Sharh al-Mawahib al-Saniyya, it is stated that, "Some scholars used to loosen their tassels from the left front side, and I have never read any text that a tassel should be loosened from the right side except in a weak hadith narrated by al-Tabrani. Now since this has become a distinguishing mark of the Imamites, it ought to be abandoned in order to avoid looking like them."

13. al-Sha'rani, Al-Mizan, Vol. 1, p. 138.
14. al-Marghinani, Al-Hidaya, Vol. 1, p. 33.
15. Al-Fiqh 'ala al-Mathahib al-Arba'ah, Vol. 1, p. 189.

[16.](#) Ibn Najim, Al-Bahr al-Ra'iq, Vol. 1, p. 319.

[17.](#) Al-Kafi 'ala Hamish Mir'at al-'Uqul, Vol. 3, p. 129. as-Saduq, Al-Faqih, p. 69. Shaikh al-Tusi, Al-Tahtib, Vol. 1, p. 266, in a chapter dealing with what ought to be recited following the prayers.

[18.](#) Shaikh as-Saduq, Al-Faqih, p. 69.

[19.](#) Ibn Qudamah, Al-Mughni, Vol. 1, p. 626. Ibn Muflih, Al-Furu', Vol. 1, p. 382.

[20.](#) Kitab al-Umm, Vol. 1, p. 116. al-Mazni, Al-Mukhtasar, Vol. 1, p. 90. al-Ghazali, Al-Wajiza, Vol. 1, p. 32.

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