

The Eleventh Imam, Hasan ibn 'Ali (al-Askari) (as)

Born in Madina on the 10th of Rabuil Akhar 232 Hijri (6.12.846 AD) Died in Samarra Iraq on 8th of Rabiul Awwal 260 Hijri (4.1.874) aged 28 years. Period of Imamate 6 years.

Samarra (Surre Mun Ra') was a garrison town about 60 miles north of Baghdad. River Euphrates flows in the middle of the town, and because of the surrounding hills a cool breeze keeps the area cooler in comparison to Baghdad. The word 'Asker' in Arabic is used for army. Our 11th Imam's title became known as Askari, the one who lived all his life in a garrison town.

There is another story related with this name by many historians. Once the Caliph called him in his palace and ordered his army to march past before him. The Caliph wanted to boast or to impress the Imam of his power or to dissuade the Imam from any thoughts of revolution against the Abbasid Caliphate.

When the march past was over, Imam asked the Caliph to gaze between two of his fingers. What the Caliph saw was a huge army of lancers and swords men marching past, a much bigger crowd than the Caliph's army. He was astonished at this miracle and named him Askari, i.e. the man with a big army.

Imam Hasan al Askari's (as) life from childhood to adulthood was spent in this house where his father Imam 'Ali Naqi (as) was to remain under house arrest. But despite this close guard on the Imam, he conducted his duties as Imam from inside the house.

He taught people Qur'an and instructed his followers the true teachings of Islam as taught by the Prophet of Islam and his Ahlul Bayt. In fact Imam Hasan al-Askari wrote a complete Tafseer of the Qur'an which was mentioned by many scholars, historians and exegetes, including Kulaini and Saduq.

Imam's life in Samarra was not in peace even under house arrest. From time to time he was taken to Baghdad, questioned and put in prison there. On one such occasion, the Imam was taken by the Turkish guards to Baghdad where he was kept in prison during the short reign of the Caliph al-Muktadi and al-

Mu'tamid afterwards.

While he was a prisoner in Baghdad there was a severe draught. Rain had not fallen for some time and crops were drying up. People were facing a famine. They did not know what to do. A Christian priest came to the rescue. He lifted his hands in prayer and rain fell. The Caliph became concerned lest for this reason people would forsake Islam and become Christians.

When the Imam was consulted, he said that when people assembled to see the so called miracle performed by the Christian priest, he would remove their doubts. The Imam was allowed to leave the prison to go where the crowd assembled to see the miracle performed by the priest.

Imam stood there with the crowd and when the priest raised his hands for prayer and rain began to fall, Imam told one of his companions to seize the hands of the priest and bring the piece of bone hidden in his hands.

When this bone was brought before the Imam, he said that it was the bone of a Prophet of God. It was the effect of this holy bone when lifted in prayers to God that brought God's mercy and brought rain to the land. This way the Imam lifted the doubts from the minds of the people. After this the Imam himself spread his prayer mat and performed two Rak'ats of prayers then lifted his bare hands to God for rain to come to the land and wipe out the draught.

The Imam's prayers were heard by the Almighty and rain fell so much that the land became fertile again and crops began to grow. (Kulaini, Akhbarus Alam) In recognition of this service the Imam was allowed to leave the prison in Baghdad and live in his house in Samarra, still under house arrest. He was still not allowed to go to Madina.

A detailed account of the marriage of Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) was told by Majlisi in Biharul Anwar. His father Imam 'Ali Naqi (as) entrusted this important matter to his friend Bashir ibn Sulaiman. First the Imam wrote a letter in the script of 'Rum' and sealed it with his own noble seal. He placed the letter in a red purse, with 220 Dinars and then said to his friend, "Take this letter and go to Baghdad. Go to the ferry at the River Tigris when the boats from Syria are being unloaded. Look out for the ship owner whose name is Amr.

Observe when he exhibits a slave girl who would be with two silk garments and a veil to protect her from being seen or handled by the buyers. You will hear her call out in the language of 'Rum', 'even if you have the wealth and glory of Solomon the son of David, I can never have affection for you, so take care lest you waste your money in purchasing me.'

And if a buyer approaches her, she will say, 'Cursed be the man who unveils my eyebrow' Her owner will then protest, 'But what recourse have I, I am compelled to sell you? You will then hear the slave answer, 'Why this haste, let me choose my purchaser, that my heart may accept him in confidence and gratitude.'

“ You are to go then O Bashir, and tell the trader Amr that you have a letter written in the script of Rum by a certain nobleman, and that this letter shows his kindness, appreciation and liberality. You must give this letter to the slave girl to read, that she may agree to be bought by the man who has passed this letter to you.

Bashir reported later, “ When I carried out these instructions and the girl received the letter, she began to cry as she read the letter. Then she said to Amr, “ Sell me to the writer of this letter, for if you refuse I would surely be very unhappy and you will never be able to sell me to anyone else.” I therefore talked over the price with Amr, until we agreed on the 220 Dinars my master had given me. When I paid the money, and received the girl.

She came with me without protest. In fact she was smiling and looking very pleased. In her excitement she took the letter from the Imam ‘Ali Naqi (as) from her pocket and kissed it, put it on her eyes and then put it back into her pocket. I told her I was amazed that she should act this way when as yet she did not know the writer. She answered, “May the descendant of the Prophet dispel your doubts.” Afterwards she gave me the following account of herself.

“ I am a princess, the granddaughter of the Emperor of Rum. My mother was a descendant of the disciple Simon, the vicegerent of Jesus. My grandfather the Emperor was anxious to marry me to his nephew. I was 15 years old. At his castle he gathered a great assembly, including 300 monks and hermits, 700 of the nobility and 4000 of the officials of the army.

I had a special throne made for me where I sat with the man I was about to wed. Christian priests were ready to pay us honor. They opened the Injil (Bible), and immediately all the images around us fell to the ground and broke. My cousin also fell down on the ground and fainted.

All the great officials were overcome with fear and said, “ O’ king, preserve us from witnessing this ill-fated day, for this sort of thing is a proof of the decline and disappearance of the Christian religion as we know it.” At this my grandfather was very angry and he ordered that all images should be brought back and put in their places.

Once again they all fell down and a great storm blew the lights all around. At this second occurrence people were frightened and left the assembly hall. My grandfather fell himself and the whole occasion was cancelled for some other day.

One night after this I saw a dream, in which Jesus appeared with his disciples at the palace where the throne was erected. There they built a pulpit of light, and behold, Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his wasi ‘Ali (as) and all his exalted descendants came into the palace. Jesus went forward to embrace Muhammad,(S) who said, O’Spirit of God, I have come to seek the daughter of your Wasi Simon for my son Hasan al-Askari.”

Jesus (as) looked to Simon who was with him and said, “ Nobility and glory has come to you in this

chance to unite mercy with that of the family of Muhammad (S).” To this Simon assented and all of them assented to the pulpit of Light while Muhammad (S) conducted the wedding service. After the dream, when I woke up I was afraid and dared not repeat the story to my father or my brothers for fear that they would kill me.

While I kept the secret, love of Hasan al-Askari found its place in my heart and constrained me to give up drinking wine and I did not want to eat. As a result of not eating I grew thin and became ill. All possible treatment was available for me but without success. In the end my father told me, “ O’you who have seen a light, tell me what is wrong with me.

The doors of pleasure are closed for me. A voice replied, " if you set some of your prisoners free, it is possible that Jesus and his mother may help you.” I told my father of this dream and requested that some of the prisoners should be set free. My father granted my request, and after that I took food and felt better.

A few days passed and I had another vision, when Fatima the daughter of the Prophet and Mariam, the mother of Jesus came to me and explained that Hasan al-Askari could not come to me unless I should become a Muslim and declare, that there no God but One God and Muhammad is the last apostle of God. This I accepted and after that I saw Hasan al-Askari in my vision.”

But how did you come to fall among the prisoners? asked Bashir. She replied, “ Hasan al-Askari told me that my father was planning to send an army against the Muslims and that I should disguise myself and some of my women servants and arrange to go along with the army. I did this and before long some of the Muslim army guards captured us, and now you see how it all turned out.”

Bashir related that when they reached Samarra he went to the Imam ‘Ali Naqi (as) who received the party gladly. The Imam asked the girl if he should give her Ten Thousand Dinars or a bit of good news. When she chose the latter, he informed her that she was to be given to his son Hasan al-Askari as she has seen in her dreams and that she was to be the mother of the one who was to cause justice to reign upon the earth. She was then committed to ‘Ali Naqi’s sister Hakima who was to look after her.

Such is the account of the wedding of Hasan al-Askari to Nargis Khatoon as Majlisi recorded it in such detail in Bihar-al-Anwar.(The same account was found in Shaikh Tusi’s book) A few days later the wedding took place between Imam Hasan al-Askari and Nargis Khatoon, the granddaughter of the Emperor of Rum.

Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) lived a short life, only Twenty Eight years and in this short life he had to endure great sufferings by the hands of the Abbasid caliphs. But in spite of all that suffering and confinement under house arrest in Samarra, many students of Islam benefited from his God gifted knowledge and later became scholars in their fields.

He discussed with agnostics of that age many times about the existence of God and the reasons for the

necessity of the Prophets and Imams and many atheists changed their minds and converted to Islam. One of those was Ishaq al-kindī who was writing a book about contradictions in Qur'an. Imam invited some of his students and taught them lessons from the Qur'an.

These students of Al-kindī confronted their teacher and rejected his arguments about the contradictions in the Holy Book. Al-Kindī realized that these arguments could not have come from the brains of these young students. He asked them about the secret of their extensive knowledge of the Qur'an. In the end they confessed that Imam Hasan al-Askari taught them.

Kindī himself became the disciple of our Imam, burnt his own writings on atheism and later wrote many treatises on Islam.

Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) also dictated many Traditions of the Holy Prophet and recorded many explanations of the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

One of the famous traditions people learnt from Imam Hasan al-Askari was, “ The wine drinker is like an idolater.” Ibn al Jawzī in his book “Tehrim al Khamr” mentioned this tradition from the Imam from the most reliable narrators of Hadith.

Historians have noted many names of the Imam's students who became scholars of their time

One of the famous students of the Imam was Abu 'Ali al-Hasan ibn Khalid who prepared a commentary of the Holy Qur'an which should be considered the work of the Imam himself. The Imam used to dictate its contents to Abu 'Ali who went on writing the commentary. Scholars indicated that the book consisted of 1920 pages.

In spite of the fact that the Imahād never given any cause for concern to the Caliphs of his time, their guilt in this matter was so great that they did not leave these pious personalities in peace. If they had no fear of their throne they were afraid of the excellence and knowledge of the Imams.

In the case of Imam Hasan al-Askari, the same type of jealousy led to the poisoning of the Imam to end this life of a saint whose only activity was to teach Qur'an as the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt taught before him.

During the rule of Al-Mu'tamid poison was given to the Imam mixed in some fruit and he died on 8th Rabi-al-Awwal 260 Hijri. He left only one son, whose name was Muhammad who was only five years old when his father died.

The Caliph Al- Mu'tamid himself attended the funeral prayer. When they all lined up and were ready to commence the prayers, Imam Hasan al-Askari's brother Jaafar stood in front of the people to lead the prayer. Before he could commence the prayer, a five year old boy came out of the house, went near his uncle.

Shook his mantle and told him, “set aside uncle, only an Imam can lead the funeral prayer of an Imam”. His uncle Jaafar stepped aside and this five year old boy lead the prayers. Immediately after the end of the prayer he went inside his house and was not seen by his pursuers, led by the caliph Mu’tamid himself.

Our Eleventh Imam was buried in the same house where he had died, by the side of his father Imam ‘Ali Naqi (as) . By the passage of time, the place was transformed into a great mausoleum and pilgrims from all over the Islamic lands came to pay their homage to the two Imams of Ahlul Bayt who were buried there.

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