

The Fourth Imam: 'Ali ibn Husayn

Birth and Martyrdom

According to some traditions, Imam Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was born on the fifteenth of Jamadul 'ula' in the year thirty one or thirty six A.H. in Medina.¹ His father was Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) and his mother, based on some narrations, was Shahrbanu, daughter of Yazdgird (Iranian King).² His nicknames were Abul Hasan, Abul Qasim, Abu Muhammad, Abu Bakr, and his most famous titles were Ziynul 'abidin, Ziyunus Salihin, and Sajjad.³

According to some traditions, he was martyred on twelfth of Muharram in the year ninety four A.H. in Medina and his holy body was buried in Baqi' cemetery.

Imam Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) lived fifty seven years in this world. When he was two years old, his grandfather Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) was martyred. He then experienced the Imamate of his uncle, Imam Hasan (a.s.) for ten years. On 'ashura of the year sixty one A.H., when his father was martyred, Imam Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was twenty two. He lived thirty five years –his Imamate age– after his father.⁴

Texts Proving His Imamate

In addition to general reasons for Imamate of the twelve infallible Imams (a.s.), certain specific reasons are pointed out for proving the Imamate of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), some of which are quoted here from his father, Imam Husayn (a.s.).

Abu Bakr Hazrami has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.), “When Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) was going to travel to Iraq, he gave a book and a will to Umm Salamah. When Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) returned from Karbala to Medina, Umm Salamah gave the trusts to him.”⁵

Fuzayl Ibn Yasar has narrated from Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.), “When Imam Husayn (a.s.) was going to Iraq, he gave a book, his will, and some other things to Umm Salamah, Prophet Muhammad (S)'s wife, and said, ‘When my eldest son comes to you, give these to him.’ After Imam Husayn's (a.s.)

martyrdom, his son Ali went to Umm Salamah and took the trusts.” [6](#)

Abul Jarud has quoted from Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.), “Imam Husayn (a.s.) called his daughter, Fatimah, before his martyrdom and gave her a wrapped book and an open will. At that time, Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was very sick. Later, Fatimah gave him the book. By Allah that the book is now with us.” Abul Jarud asked, “What is in this book?” Imam Baqir (a.s.) answered, “Whatever the people need exists in the book. By Allah that all Islamic commandments and limits (the Hudud) are in it, even the compensation fee for a scrape on the skin.” [7](#)

Abdullah Ibn ‘Atabah says, “I was with Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) when Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) came in. I asked Imam Husayn (a.s.), ‘If you pass away one day, who should we refer to?’ Imam (a.s.) answered, ‘Refer to this son of me. He will be the Imam and the father of Imams.’” [8](#)

Mas’udi has written in his book ‘Ithbatul Wasilah, “In Karbala, Husayn (a.s.) called Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), who was sick, presented Allah’s Great Name and the legacy of the prophets (S) to him, and informed him that the Prophet’s books, sciences, and weapon are trusted to Umm Salamah and she will give all of them to him.” [9](#)

Sayyid Murtaza has written in ‘Uyunul Murtaza, “The narrators have narrated that Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) willed that Allah’s Great Name and the Prophet (S)’s legacy be given to his son Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.). Then Imam Husayn (a.s.) stated, ‘He will be the Imam after me.’” [10](#)

Muhammad Ibn Muslim says, “I asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.), ‘Where is the ring of Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.)? I have heard that it was removed from his finger in Karbala.’ Imam (a.s.) replied, ‘That is not true. Husayn (a.s.) willed to his son, Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), gave Ali his ring, and left the Imamate to Ali, just as the Messenger of Allah (S) did in case of Amiral Mu’minin (a.s.), Amiral Mu’minin (a.s.) did in case of his son Hasan, and Hasan did in case of his brother Husayn. After Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), Imam Husayn’s (a.s.) ring was given to my father and then to me. I wear it every Friday and perform prayers with it.’

I went to Imam Sadiq (a.s.) on Friday and found him performing prayers. When his prayer finished, he stretched his hand toward me. I saw a ring in his holy finger with the sign: ‘There is no deity but Allah; preparation for meeting Allah.’ Then Imam (a.s.) said, ‘This is the ring of my grandfather, Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.).’” [11](#)

The author of Kashful Ghummah has argued for the Imamate of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) using some other reasons:

First, Imam Sajjad (a.s.) was the most virtuous most knowledgeable of the people in his own age after his father. Logically, when such a person exists, no other one can be the Imam.

Second, it is proved using logical reasons and the traditions that the existence of Imam is necessary in all ages; the earth will never be void of Allah’s successor. The people who claimed to be the Imam in the

age of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) had no true reason for their Imamate and their claims were invalid.

Therefore, the Imamate of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) is proved, as there should be an Imam on the earth.

Third, there are some traditions from the Messenger of Allah (S) about the Imamate of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), such as the tradition Jabir has narrated from Prophet Muhammad (S), Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) narrated from his father, from his grandfather, and from Fatimah (s.a.), daughter of the Messenger of Allah (S). The names of the twelve Imams, including Imam Sajjad (a.s.), are recorded in this tradition.

As mentioned in the traditions, Amiral Mu'minin (a.s.) had declared the Imamate of Ali, son of Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.), when Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) was alive.

Moreover, Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.) referred to the Imamate of his son, Ali, in his will before being martyred and gave the will to Umm Salaamh to be given to his son, Ali, after himself. Imam Husayn (a.s.) has considered asking for the will from Umm Salamah as a sign of the real Imam. [12](#)

Jabir Ibn Abdullah 'Ansari told the Prophet (S), "O Messenger of Allah! Who will be the Imams from the progeny of Ali Ibn Abi Talib?" Prophet Muhammad (S) stated, "Hasan and Husayn, masters of youth of the Paradise. Then master of the worshippers, Ali Ibn Husayn and then Baqir; Muhammad Ibn Ali. O Jabir! You will be alive and see him, so say my hello to him! After him, Sadiq, Ja'far Ibn Muhammad, then Al-Kadhim, Musa Ibn Ja'far, then Ridha', Ali Ibn Musa. After him, Taqi, Muhammad Ibn Ali, and then Naqi, Ali Ibn Muhammad. After him, Zaki, Hasan Ibn Ali, and then his son, Qa'im, Mahdi. He will fill the world with justice after being filled with injustice and oppression.

O Jabir! They will be my successors, progeny, and caliphs. Everyone who obeys them has obeyed me. And everyone who disobeys them has disobeyed me. Everyone who denies one or all of them has denied me. Allah keeps the earth from swallowing its residents because of the bliss of their existence." [13](#)

[Virtues of Imam Sajjad](#)

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was the best most virtuous of the people of his own age, so he was called the adornment of the worshippers.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) stated, "In the Hereafter, a caller will cry out, 'Where is Ziynul 'Abidin (the adornment of worshippers)?' It is as if I see Ali Ibn Husayn, who has stood up and is walking among people's lines in the Hereafter." [14](#)

When Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was leaving the circle of 'Umar Ibn Abdul 'Aziz, 'Umar asked the audience, "Who is the noblest of the people?" The people said, "You." 'Umar said, "No, it is not me. It is the one who just left us." [15](#)

Husham Ibn Abdul Malik went to *Hajj* pilgrimage before his caliphate. He was going to touch and kiss the Hajarul 'Aswad, but he could not because of the crowd. At that time, Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) arrived there.

The *Hajjis* opened a way for him to Hajarul 'Aswad. The companions of Husham asked, "Who is this man?" "I do not know him," answered Husham. Farazdaq, the poet, heard Husham's speech and told him, "I know him well; he is Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), Ziyunul 'Abidin." Then he composed a pretty poem for introducing Imam Sajjad (a.s.).[16](#)

Abu Hazim, Sufyan Ibn 'Aynah and Zahri have narrated, "We did not see anyone better and more knowledgeable than Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) among Hashemite."[17](#)

Worship and Vigil

After Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was the most devout person in his age, thus he was called Ziyunul Abidin.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said about Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), "When the prayer time came, his body trembled, his face paled, and shivered like a palm tree."[18](#)

Imam Baqir (a.s.) stated, "When my father began praying he was quite still as the stem of a tree."[19](#)

Abu Hamzah Thumali says, "I saw Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) whose cloak fell off his shoulder in prayer, but he did not move to put it in place until his prayer completed. I asked him the reason. Imam (a.s.) said, 'Do you know who I was standing before? Surely one's prayer is accepted as much as his heart attends to Allah.'" [20](#)

When Imam Sajjad (a.s.) rose for performing prayer his face paled, his body trembled, and his state changed. When he was asked for the reason, he said, "I am going to rise before a Great King."

When he began praying, he ignored everything and it was as if he heard no voice.[21](#)

Abdullah, the son of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) says, "My father prayed at nights until he got tired and crawled to his bed like children."[22](#)

If Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) could not perform nawafil (recommended prayers) of the day, he performed them at night. He told his children, "Though the nawafil are not obligatory, I like you to continue every good thing you get used to." Imam Sajjad's (a.s.) son continues, "My father did not leave the Night Prayer at home or in travel."[23](#)

The father of Abu Hamzah Thumali says, "I saw Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), who was performing prayer beside Ka'bah. He lasted his standing so much until he got tired and lent over his feet alternatively. I heard him saying, 'O my Master! Do you punish me while my heart is full of your love? By Your honor do not gather me together with the people who have long been Your enemy.'"

Zahri has quoted from Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), "If all the people die in East and West of the world but the Quran accompany me, I will not be fearful at all." Zahri continues, "And when he reached the Quranic

verse 'Master of the Day of Judgment', he repeated it to the extent that he was going to die."[24](#)

Imam Baqir (a.s.) stated, "Fatimah, the daughter of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, saw Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), who was exhausted from worship. So she went to Jabir Ibn Abdullah 'Ansari and said, 'O companion of Messenger of Allah! We deserve being advised by you in case one of us exhausts himself out of intensive worship and harms his health. Now Ali Ibn Husayn, who is the memory of his father, has callus on his forehead, knees, and hands. Come and talk to him so that he puts himself less in trouble for worship.'"

Jabir went to Imam Sajjad (a.s.) and saw him in worship. Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) rose for Jabir, greeted him, and seated him beside himself."

Jabir said, 'O son of Messenger of Allah! Do you know that the Exalted Allah has created the Paradise for you and your lovers and the Hell for your enemies? Why do you take yourself into trouble in worship?'"

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) said in reply, 'O companion of Messenger of Allah! Don't you know that my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah (S) had no sin, but did not leave intensive worship until his holy feet inflated? And he said in answer to the advisors, 'Shouldn't I be a grateful servant?'"

When Jabir heard Imam Sajjad's (a.s.) speech, he said, 'O son of Messenger of Allah! Watch for your health, since you are from a family (the Ahlul Bayt) for whose sake the earth is away from calamities and the rain is descending.'"

Imam Sajjad (a.s.) stated, 'O Jabir! I do not leave the tradition of my father and grandfathers until I meet them.'"[25](#)

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) went to *Hajj* on foot and traversed the distance between Medina and Mecca in twenty days.[26](#)

Almsgiving

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said, "My father divided all his property into two parts, giving half of it to the poor, twice in his lifetime."[27](#)

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) filled his sack with bread and other foods, divided it among the poor, and said, "Almsgiving extinguishes the fire of Allah's wrath."[28](#)

'Umar Ibn Dinar says, "Ziyad Ibn Usamah cried before his death. Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) who was present asked the reason for his weeping. 'Umar answered, 'I have fifteen thousand dinars debt and cannot afford to pay it. I am fearful of dying and being still a debtor.' Imam Sajjad (a.s.) stated, 'Do not be upset. I will pay your debt.'"[29](#)

Abdullah was at the point of death. His creditors had surrounded him and asked their money. He told them, "I have no money to pay you, but I will to one of my two cousins, Ali Ibn Husayn or Abdullah Ibn Ja'far to pay your loan. You can choose anyone you like." The creditors said, "Abdullah Ibn Ja'far is wealthy. Ali Ibn Husayn is not wealthy but he is truthful; we choose him."

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was informed of the issue. He said, "I will pay your loan after cropping the crop." The creditors were satisfied, though Imam Sajjad (a.s.) had no crop. However, at harvest time, the Almighty Allah granted him some property to pay the loan he had accepted.[30](#)

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said, "My father held a sack of dinar and food at dark nights. He knocked on the poor houses and divided the money and food among them, while he had hid his face. After his demise, the poor found out that the unidentified man has been Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.)."[31](#)

Zahri has said, "On a cold rainy night, I saw Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.), who was going with some wheat on his shoulder. I told him, 'O son of Messenger of Allah! What are you carrying?' Imam Sajjad (a.s.) replied, 'I am going to travel, so I am transferring my sustenance to a safe place.' I said, 'Let my servant help you!' But Imam (a.s.) did not accept. I said, 'Let me help you!' Imam Sajjad (a.s.) answered, 'I should carry it myself and take it to the destination. Go away and leave me alone!' After some days, I saw Imam (a.s.), who had not gone to travel yet. I told him, 'O son of Messenger of Allah! Have you not gone on travel yet?' Imam Sajjad (a.s.) told me, 'O Zahri! That travel was not like what you thought. I meant the travel to the Hereafter for which I should prepare myself. Preparedness for death is in two ways; avoiding the unlawful deeds and spending property in charity.'"[32](#)

When Medina was attacked by the army of Yazid, Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) accepted the guardianship of four hundred families until the army of Muslim Ibn 'Aqabah left Medina.[33](#)

Modesty

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) was riding his horse when he passed a group of lepers who were eating food. They invited Imam Sajjad (a.s.) to eat with them. Imam (a.s.) said, "I am fasting, otherwise I accepted your invitation." When Imam (a.s.) reached home, he ordered to prepare a good food for the lepers. Then he invited them to his home and they ate together.[34](#)

Remission

One of the companions of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) has narrated that a relative of Imam (a.s.) insulted and misnamed him in presence of some of the companions. Imam Sajjad (a.s.), however, did not answer him. After a while, Imam (a.s.) told his companions, "You heard the insult of this man. Now I want to go and answer him. Come with me if you want." The companions accompanied Imam Sajjad (a.s.) to the insulter man's house and heard Imam (a.s.) reciting this Quranic verse,

"Those who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; for God loves those who do good."[35](#)

When they arrived at the house of that man, he came out angrily and offensively, since he thought Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) had come to treat him as he had done. Then Imam Sajjad (a.s.) told him, “O brother! You said some words about me. If what you said is true, I repent, but if it is false, May Allah forgive your sins.” The man regretted his speech, kissed the forehead of Imam (a.s.), and said, “I said things which are not true about you and deserve myself.”[36](#)

The female slave of Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) poured water for him to perform ablution. Suddenly the pitcher fell down from her hand, hit Imam’s (a.s.) head, and injured his face. Imam Sajjad (a.s.) raised his head and looked at the slave. She said, “The Almighty Allah states in Holy Quran, ‘Those who restrain anger.’” Imam Sajjad (a.s.) said, “I restrained my anger.” The female slave said again, ‘and those who pardon (all) men.’ Imam (a.s.) said, “May Allah forgive your sins.” She said, ‘for God loves those who do good.’ Imam Sajjad (a.s.) told her, “I make you free; go wherever you want.”[37](#)

Imam Sajjad (a.s.) had some guests and his servant brought kebab for the guests.

Suddenly the iron kebab skewer fell on a child’s head. The servant was embarrassed when Imam Sajjad (a.s.) told him, “You did not do it intentionally and I make you free.”[38](#)

A man insulted Imam Sajjad (a.s.), using abusive language. The companions of Imam (a.s.) wanted to attack the insulter, but Imam Sajjad (a.s.) prohibited them. Then he told the rude man, “What you do not know about me is more than what you said. Do you have a request so that I may help you?” Then Imam (a.s.) granted him a garment and a thousand dinars. That man got ashamed of his conduct after Imam’s (a.s.) benevolent conduct and regretted. From then on, whenever that man saw Imam Sajjad (a.s.), he said, “I testify that you are a progeny of the Prophet (S).”[39](#)

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) went to his cousin’s house at nights and helped him in disguise. Imam’s cousin said, “May Allah bless you that you help me. Ali Ibn Husayn does not help me; may Allah give him no Mercy!” Imam Sajjad (a.s.) heard his speech, bore it, and did not introduce himself. After Imam’s (a.s.) demise, the helps stopped, so his cousin realized that the helper has been Imam (a.s.). Then he visited Imam Sajjad’s (a.s.) grave and cried there.[40](#)

Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.) saw a group of people who were back biting him. He stopped and said, “If you tell the truth, may Allah forgive me. And if you lie, may He forgive you.”[41](#)

[1.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 14.

[2.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 13.

[3.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 4.

[4.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, pp. 8 & 154.

[5.](#) ‘Ithbatul Hudat, Vol 5, p. 212.

[6.](#) ‘Ithbatul Hudat, Vol 5, p. 212.

[7.](#) ‘Ithbatul Hudat, Vol 5, p. 213. There may appear a doubt here that needs to be clarified. This tradition cites that Imam Husayn (a.s.) gave his book and will to his daughter, Fatimah, while according to two previous traditions Imam Husayn (a.s.) had given the book and the will to Umm Salamah. It can be explained that perhaps the books and wills have been

numerous; therefore, Imam Husayn (a.s.) had given some of them to Umm Salamah and some of them to his daughter, Fatimah.

- [8.](#) 'Ithbatul Hudat, Vol 5, p. 215.
- [9.](#) 'Ithbatul Hudat, p. 216.
- [10.](#) 'Ithbatul Hudat, p. 216.
- [11.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 17.
- [12.](#) Kashful Ghummah, Vol 2, p. 265.
- [13.](#) Kamalid Din wa Tamamun Ni'mah, Vol 1, p. 372.
- [14.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 3.
- [15.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 3.
- [16.](#) Kashful Ghummah, Vol 2, p. 291.
- [17.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 97.
- [18.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 55.
- [19.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 64.
- [20.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 66.
- [21.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 80.
- [22.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 99.
- [23.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 98.
- [24.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 107.
- [25.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 60.
- [26.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 76.
- [27.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 90.
- [28.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 100.
- [29.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 56.
- [30.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 94.
- [31.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 62.
- [32.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 65.
- [33.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 101.
- [34.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 94.
- [35.](#) Surah 'Ali Imran 3: 134.
- [36.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 54.
- [37.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 68.
- [38.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 99.
- [39.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 99.
- [40.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 100.
- [41.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol 46, p. 96.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/fr/imamate-and-imams-ibrahim-amini/fourth-imam-ali-ibn-husayn#comment->