

The Sixth Infallible, Hadhrat Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, The Fourth Imam

The name of the sixth Infallible is ‘Ali (as). He is the son of Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as), and is nicknamed as Sajjad and Zayn al-‘Abidin (ornament of the pious). Imam al-Sajjad (as) was born in Medina in 38/659. He was present in the tragedy of Karbla but due to his illness his life was spared, because *jihad* is not incumbent on the ailing and his noble father did not let him fight, even though he was very eager to participate in that tragic battle.

It was the Divine expediency to hold on the link and preserve Imam al-Sajjad (as) as the heir to the great mission, i.e., Imamate and *Wilayat*. His sickness lasted no more than a few days. After that he lived 35 years, during which he spent his lifetime in battle, serving people, worshipping, and communing with Allah.

Imam al-Sajjad (as), according to different narrations, was about twenty four years old on the day of ‘Ashura of Muharram 61 (A.H.), when following his father's last will and testament and the command of Allah and the Messenger of Allah (S) he assumed the Imamate. His mother is known to be Shahrbanu, the daughter of Sassanid Yazdgird. [1](#)

What was required in the event of Karbala was the exploitation of this unique uprising and matchless epic as well as the dissemination of Imam al-Husayn (as)'s martyrdom message, which was spoken out loud enough with unrivaled valor, bravery, and strength by Imam al-Sajjad (as) and by his aunt Zaynab (as) in their captivity. It was a cry which is still resonating over the past centuries and will remain so for ever.

The ‘Ashura tragic event with all its great and matchless aspects filled with epical fervent and fidelity and pure faith apparently ended in the evening of ‘Ashura; however, the mission of Imam al-Sajjad (as) and Zaynab Kubra (as) began thenceforth.

The captives of the Ahl al-Bayt were rendered apart from the site of “love-martyrs” and the travelers

toward Allah and from beside the mutilated bodies lying in their blood. Imam al-Sajjad (as), who was sick, was placed on a bare camel's back with his two feet fastened from under the belly of the animal with fetters.

The other captives were also placed on camels and sent toward Kufa. The Kufans were quite perplexed under the heavy strangulation over the city, not daring to utter a single word, since Ibn Ziyad had ordered the chiefs of tribes to be thrown into jail and the people to leave their houses unarmed.

Meanwhile, he ordered the sacred severed heads of the martyrs to be handed out among the chiefs of the tribes who were in Karbala carrying the head of Imam al-Husayn (as) in front of the caravan. In this way, they led the caravan into the city of Kufa. 'Ubayd Allah Ziyad intended to create terror in people's minds and to show off this manifest conquest before their eyes.

But with all these intense security measures, why couldn't they prevent the unwavering and fiery statements and impressive message of the irresistible lady of history, Hadhrat Zaynab (as)? As if waking from a deep slumber, people began to find out that the captives were children of 'Ali (as) and the progeny of the Prophet (S), whose men were killed in Karbala with the sword of injustice.

There appeared a great commotion among those people, which little by little turned into bursts of weeping. Fatigued and sick and in captivity, Imam al-Sajjad (as) looked at those people and said: "Are they weeping for us? Who has killed our dear ones then?" Zaynab (as) called people to silence and after praising the Almighty Allah, and greeting His Holy Messenger, Hadhrat Muhammad (S), said: "...O people of Kufa! O impostors and plotters and traitors! May this weeping of yours be never soothed! You are like that woman who spins her cotton into thread from dawn till dusk and then starts unraveling it all along till dawn. Beware that you have founded your faith on fraudulence and trickery...!"

Hadhrat Zaynab (as), thereupon severely reproached the Kufans, asserting: "Verily, you have defiled yourselves with such a great disgrace and infamy that it could not be erased from you till the Resurrection. May baseness and abjection be upon you! Do you not know how you beheaded the beloved grandson of the Apostle of Allah (S), broke off so many pledges, took captive the nobles of his household and the freeborn of his progeny, and shed his pure blood unjustly...?"

The Kufans kept so silent and motionless as if birds had perched on their heads!

Zaynab's scathing words, as if uttered through 'Ali (as)'s pure mouth astonished the unfaithful Kufans. It surprisingly sounded like 'Ali (as)'s voice reverberating in Kufa...

Imam al-Sajjad (as) called his aunt to silence.

Ibn Ziyad ordered Imam al-Sajjad (as), Zaynab al-Kubra (as), and the other captives to be brought into his court, where he hurled the most contemptible insults at the sacred head of Imam al-Husayn (as) and the captives of Karbala, and displayed his meanness and baseness to its highest degree, and exposed

his nasty nature as vividly as it really was.

The Message of Blood and Martyrdom

Upon having conversed with the captives of Karbala in his court, Ibn Ziyad, or as he is famous with, son of Marjana, ordered his men to transfer them to a jail next to the Grand Mosque of Kufa, and ordered the sacred head of Imam al-Husayn (as) to be carried around in town in order to intimidate the people.

In reply to the letter from Ibn Ziyad who had written to him about the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as) and his companions and capturing his household, Yazid demanded that Imam al-Husayn (as)'s head and those of his companions together with captives be sent to Sham. Imam Sajjad (as) was chained on the hands, feet, and neck and seated on a camel, and the household were placed on unsaddled camels like the captives of Byzantine and Zanzibar and dispatched to Sham.

The Infallible Ahl al-Bayt (as) arrived in Sham through Ba'albak. The first day of Safar, 61 A.H, while Damascus was filled with rejoice and exultation because Yazid had introduced captives of Karbala, the pure progeny of the Prophet (S), as alien rebels in his claws. Yazid had the captives and heads of the martyrs passed by Jayrun, which was his countryside amusement place and debauchery resort. With much pleasure and delight, he watched the captives led by "Jayrun," feeling like an indisputable conqueror.

Along the streets, people stood watching the captives. A Shami old man stepped forward and stood before the caravan of the captives and said:

"Thanks God your men were killed and the cities of Islam got rid of their evil and Yazid the commander of the faithful became victorious over you."

In reply to the old man who had at that age not been secure from the Umayyads' poisonous propaganda, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) said: "O Shaykh! Have you read the Qur'an?" "Yes," replied the old man. Imam (as) asked him if he had read this verse, ﴿Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of [my] near of the kin."﴾ (Al-Qur'an, 42: 23). The man said, "Yes."

The Imam (as) said: "Those near of the kin love of whom Allah Almighty has ordered and regarded as the reward for the Prophethood of the Messenger (S), are we." Then, he recited the verse of *tathir* which had been revealed to the Prophet (S) concerning his own household

﴿إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾ 33

﴿**And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless.**﴾ (Al-Qur'an, 33: 33).

Then the Imam said: "We are the ones referred to in this verse, and whom Allah has made pure of any external and internal impurity." The old man got astonished and wept, admitting how negligent he had been. Then he asked the Imam (as) "Will I be forgiven if I repent? The Imam reassured him of this. Then he was killed as a martyr for this awareness.

In any case, the caravan of the Godly captives was halted in front of Damascus Grand Mosque. Then, being roped together, the captives were transferred to a prison. They spent several days in that prison which was like a ruin. However, Yazid intended to invite the prominent of every school, ambassadors, dignitaries, and the court's flatterers to a ceremonial feast to display his ostentatious triumph.

In this meeting, Yazid did the same insults as his vile hireling, Ibn Ziyad, had done in Kufa. That is, with his walking stick he hit on the lips and teeth of Imam al-Husayn (as) which were frequently kissed by the Apostle of Allah (S), 'Ali Murtadha (as), and Fatimah al-Zahra (as). When Zaynab (as) noticed this impudence was being done by Yazid who at the same time said to Imam al-Sajjad (as),

"Thanks God that He finally disgraced you," she rose to her feet at once. Extremely outraged, she started to chide and reproach Yazid and his followers, stating eloquently the message of the Martyr's blood and exposing the wrongdoings and meanness of Yazid and his gang. In this way, she degraded Yazid even more notoriously than the Kufans. Yazid, however, cast his head down, tolerating the scathing and defaming words which ruined his false personality, and in reply he only recited a couplet as follows:

"Wailing and lamenting by the bereaved is permissible, and the death of the dead one sounds easy for the hired women mourners."

Imam al-Sajjad (as) in Damascus

Besides the words Imam al-Sajjad (as) uttered with reference to the Holy Qur'an and exposed the truth, when he encountered Yazid and as he was chained all the way down to Damascus, he said: "O Yazid! By God what do you think the Messenger of Allah (S) would do if he saw us in this poor condition? This statement had such a deep impact on Yazid that he ordered the chain removed from him and then all the companions wept over that.

A better chance that the fourth Imam (as) found was a day when the formal preacher got on the pulpit and started to speak ill of 'Ali (as) and his pure progeny and praise Mu'awiya and Yazid. Imam al-Sajjad (as) asked Yazid: "Would you allow me, too, to go upon this pile of wood to say words which would both please Allah and bring forth reward for the people?" Yazid did not like to permit, since he was aware of the knowledge and eloquence of the infallible household (as) and was scared.

The people insisted, so he had to agree, and the fourth Imam (as) got upon the pulpit and spoke in such a way that rent their hearts and brought tears to the eyes of both men and women. Following is a brief

summary of what the holy Imam (as) said:

“O people! Allah has granted six privileges to us and our superiority over others is based on seven things. Knowledge is with us, so also are forbearance, generosity, eloquence, bravery, and heartfelt friendship of the believers. Allah has ordained that the faithful people love us, and this is what our enemies cannot prevent.”

He went on to say: “The Apostle of Allah (S) belongs to us, so are also his successor and legatee (*wasi*), ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as), Hamza Sayyid al-Shuhada, Ja‘far al-Tayyar, the two grandsons of the Prophet (S), al-Hasan and al-Husayn (as), and the Mahdi of this *umma* and the Lord of Time.”

Then the Imam introduced himself, causing such a commotion that forced the agents present around to interrupt and to silence the Imam (as) by ordering the muezzin (man who calls to prayer) to recite the call to prayer (*adhan*).

The Imam kept silence, but as soon as the muezzin said: “*Ashhadu anna Muhamadan rasul Allah* (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah)”, he took the turban off his head and said: “O muezzin I swear you by this Muhammad to get silent.” Then, facing Yazid, he said:

“Is this noble Prophet your ancestor or ours? If you say he is your ancestor, everybody knows you are telling a lie; and if you admit he is ours, then why did you kill his son al-Husayn (as)? Why did you kill his children? Why did you plunder his property? Why did you take his women and children as captive?”

Then the Imam (as) took hold of his own collar and tore it down [as a sign of disgust and protest], and those present in the gathering burst into wailing and tears. A commotion rose up again. This was indeed an epic message of ‘Ashura being delivered to all ears; and the call of the truth addressed to the history.

Upon hearing these protests, Yazid started cursing and damning Ibn Ziyad and even – apparently – reprimanded some of the troops that had accompanied the captives. At last, being apprehended, he turned away from them and tried to contact less with people.

However, owing to the disclosures by the Imam (as) and the distressing conditions, Yazid decided to console the captives. He asked Imam al-Sajjad: “Would you like to stay with us in Sham or go to Medina?” Imam al-Sajjad (as) and Zaynab Kubra replied: “We like to be near our ancestor's grave in Medina.”

[Leaving for Medina](#)

In Safar 61/October 680 the Infallible Ahl al-Bayt (as) left for Medina with dignity and honor. Nu‘man b. Bashir, along with five hundred men, accompanied the caravan. Imam al-Sajjad (as) and the other members of Ahl al-Bayt (as) were approaching Medina when the Imam (as) selected a place in the outskirts and ordered the caravan settle there.

He ordered some tents be pitched there. Then, he told Bashir b. Jadhlam to write an elegy and inform people of Medina of their arrival. Bashir went straight to Medina and to the tomb of the Prophet (S) and stood there before the Madinans, reciting his poems as follows:

“Behold! O people of Medina! There is no chance here for you to stay any longer, for Imam al-Husayn (as) has been killed, and now here are my tears rolling down. Alas! His pure body, smeared with blood and dust, was left behind in Karbala, and his head on top of a spear was carried around cities.” The people at once burst into a frenzied wailing, among whom were the Hashemite women wailing and lamenting with the most heart rending cries.

The people left their houses and raced outside the city. Bashir said: “I abandoned the horse and hastened to the tents of the Ahl al-Bayt. At this time Imam al-Sajjad (as) came out of his tent and while wiping his flowing tears motioned people to silence.

Then, after praising Almighty Allah, he started talking about the heart-rending tragedy of Karbala. Here is part of what he said: ‘If our ancestor, the Apostle of Allah (S) had ordered to murder and plunder and persecute us, there would have been no more cruelty than this on us; whereas there had been clear instructions for protecting and respecting us. We implore Allah to have mercy and blessing on us and revenge our enemies.’”

Thereafter, Imam al-Sajjad (as), Zaynab Kubra (as) and their companions and the bereaved mourners of Imam al-Husayn (as) entered Medina. First, they went to the holy mausoleum of their ancestor, the Apostle of Allah (S) and then to Baqi‘cemetery, complaining with tearful eyes of the disdainful people.

For a long time there were mourning rituals held in Medina for Imam al-Husayn (as), during which Imam al-Sajjad (as) and Zaynab Kubra (as) talked about the appalling tragedy of Karbala and clarified to people the purposeful martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as) and his message to people, exposing the corruption of the Umayyads ruling system so that the people would know the extent of the tragedy and tyranny and learn how to take revenge of the oppressors of their time.

In that era, there were four extremely sensitive and important spots in the Muslim world: Damascus; Kufa; Mecca; Medina, i.e. the Holy Shrine of the Apostle of Allah (S) and the center for preserving the memories of the adorable Islam and the respected Prophet (S). In all four spots, Imam al-Sajjad (as) played an influential role, following which people’s awakening and different kinds of revolts and dissidence ensued.

Thenceforth, the history of Islam witnessed uprisings which were inspired by Imam al-Husayn (as)’s great uprising in Karbala, including the battle of Harrah,² taking place a year later in which Yazid’a agents committed a tragic massacre against the uprising of the people of Medina. ‘Ali (as)’s children, each in a corner of the Muslim world, were planning to revolt and take revenge, which finally led to the uprising of Abu Muslim Khurasani and the overthrow of the corrupt dynasty of the Umayyads.

Fighting with and criticizing the selfish and unjust conducts of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs gradually mounted in various ways among Muslims, especially among the Shi'ites of Imam 'Ali (as) throughout the history, whereby Shi'ism was introduced as a combating and resistance movement delivering the message of martyrdom. Although the Shi'ites have always suffered atrocities and tortures, they have retained this revolutionary spirit to the present after over fourteen centuries.

Although Imam al-Sajjad (as) was apparently staying at home, he would always express the message of martyrdom and fight against tyrants through his supplications and sermons and keeping in touch with his close Shi'ite followers such as Abu Hamza Thumali and Abu Khalid Kabuli.

At the same time, he was also engaged in enjoining good and forbidding evil; his sincere followers received religious knowledge and Islamic decrees from his holiness and spread them among others. Thus, Shi'ism developed in many aspects. It was due to these overt and covert campaigns that Imam al-Sajjad (as) was for the second time captured and sent to Sham in chains by order of 'Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad ruler, and returned to Medina after a while.³

During his 35 years of Imamate, Imam al-Sajjad (as) would, wherever necessary, attempt in awakening the people and inciting them against tyranny and aberration and in many cases rendered plenty of social services in support of the poor and the unattended families, as well as dissemination of the Islamic knowledge, purification of people's souls and morality, and awakening them by means of supplications compiled in *Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya*.

Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya

Ranking among the most valuable Islamic works, *Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya* includes 57 supplications containing the most accurate theistic, devotional, social, and ethical issues, known as Psalms of the Household of the Prophet (S).

One of the historical events that reflects a perspective of Imam al-Sajjad (as)'s bright character is the elegy that Farazdaq, the poet, recited in praise of the Imam (as) before the House of Ka'ba.

Historians have stated: "During the rule of Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, the heir apparent (*wali ahd*) and his brother went to Mecca with the intention of performing Hajj pilgrimage and stepped into the Holy Mosque to perform circumambulation (*tawaf*). As they approached the Ka'ba to pay tribute to the Black Stone (by touching and kissing), the pressing crowd obstructed their way to the Hatim, forcing them to retreat and sit on the pulpit to wait for the crowd to recede.

Around them also gathered the dignitaries of Sham who accompanied them and watched the circumambulation ritual. At this moment the majestic light of Imam 'Ali b. Husayn (as), whose countenance was the most glorious and whose attire was the neatest and whose fragrance was the most pleasant of all those attending the circumambulation ritual, appeared from one corner of the

Mosque and began to circumambulate the Ka'ba.

As he got near the Black Stone, the huge crowd stepped back at the sight of his grandeur and majesty to open the way to the Black Stone for the Imam (as) and his retinue, so he could touch and kiss the Stone in convenience.

Watching this scene incited a wave of fury and jealousy in the heart and soul of Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik, and while he was burning in disgust, one of the nobles of Sham faced him and asked with astonishment: "Who is this person to whom all the people turned in adoration and respect and cleared the way for him to go on with the circumambulation?"

Although he knew the Imam (as) and his status quite well, Hisham feigned ignorance and replied that he did not know him out of intense hatred and for the fear that his courtiers might be impressed and enchanted by the Imam (as) and his position and words.

At this moment, Abu Faras (Farazdaq) who witnessed this scene became very agitated by Hisham's feigning ignorance and although he was a court poet himself and without feeling endangered by the wrath and violence of that arrogant prince, he addressed the Shami man and said: "If you want to know who that person is, ask me as I know very well who he is."

Then, Farazdaq, in a moment of great sublimation and manifestation of faith and ascension of soul, recited his everlasting ode revealed to him by his fully awake conscience with utmost fever. Here is a part of that ode:

"The one you know not is the one whose footsteps are known by the land of Batha' and the one who is known by the Ka'ba and the sanctuary, inside and out."

"He is the one whose grandfather is Ahmad Mukhtar upon whom be peace and Mercy of Allah as long as destiny prevails... He is the son of Fatimah (as), the chief of the ladies of the world, and 'Ali (as), the legatee and successor of the Prophet (S) from whose sword would brightly blaze Allah's wrath fire and revenge flames."

When Farzdaq ended his recitation, Hisham, like someone awakened from a deep sleep, retorted to Farzdaq: "Why have you not written such eulogies in praise of us?" He replied: "Bring an ancestor like his, a father the same in rank as his and a purely virtuous mother as his, then I will praise you, too."

Hisham got outraged and ordered the name of the poet be eliminated from the award list, and himself be imprisoned in the land of 'Asfan, somewhere between Mecca and Medina.

When the news reached Imam al-Sajjad (as), he sent twelve thousand Dirhams to Farzdaq as an award and apologized for not being able to send more. Farzdaq did not accept the award and sent him the following message: "I wrote this ode to please Allah and his Apostle (S), and to defend the Truth, not wanting an award." The Imam (as) sent back the award and swore him to accept it and reassured him

that its real value would not be belittled before Allah.

Anyhow, it was these values that provoked the enemy's spite and vindictiveness.

It is written that finally Imam Zayn al-'Abidin – Sayyid al-Sajidin – (as) was poisoned by Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik who was instigated by Hisham, the Umayyad ruler, and was buried in Baqi' cemetery.

Some Sayings of Imam al-Sajjad (as)

Glory be to Thee, Outdazzling in signs, Creator of the heavens, Author of the spirits! To Thee belongs praise, a praise that will be permanent with Thy permanence! To Thee belongs all, the praise everlasting through Thy favor! To Thee belongs praise, a praise that will parallel Thy benefaction!

My Lord, bless Muhammad and his Household, those whom Thou hast chosen for Thy command, the treasurers of Thy knowledge, the guardians of Thy religion, Thy vicegerents in Thy earth, and Thy arguments against Thy servants, purified from uncleanness and defilement through a purification by Thy desire, and made the mediation to Thee and the road to Thy Garden!

My Lord, bless Muhammad and his Household with a blessing which makes plentiful Thy gifts and generosity, perfects for them Thy bestowals and awards, and fills out their share of Thy kindly acts and benefits! My Lord, bless him and his Household with a blessing whose first has no term, whose term has no limit, and whose last has no utmost end!

My Lord, bless them to the weight of Thy Throne and all below it, the amount that fills the heavens and all above them, the number of Thy earths and all below and between them, a blessing that will bring them near to Thee in proximity, please Thee and them, and be joined to its likes forever!

O God, surely Thou hast confirmed Thy religion in all times with an Imam whom Thou hast set up as a guidepost to Thy servants and a lighthouse in Thy lands, after his cord has been joined to Thy cord! Thou hast appointed him the means to Thy good pleasure, made obeying him obligatory, cautioned against disobeying him, and commanded following his commands, abandoning his prohibitions, and that no forward-goer go ahead of him or back-keeper keep back from him! So he is the preservation of the shelter-seekers, the cave of the faithful, the handhold of the adherents, and the radiance of the worlds!⁴

¹. Imam al-Sajjad (as)'s mother, i.e., Shahrbanu daughter of Yazdgird the last Sassanid King of Iran, had died about 24 years before Karbala tragedy. See: Barrasi-yi Tarikh-i 'Ashura, p. 122.

². See: Chenarani, Muhammad Ali, The Battle of Harrah, translated into English by Ahmad Rezwani, Islamic Research Foundation, Mashhad, 2009.

³. Jala' al-'Uyun.

⁴. William C. Chittick (tr.), The Psalms of Islam, Al-Sahifat al-Kamilat al-Sajjadiyya, (Supplication 47) Muhammadi Trust, London, 1988.

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