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The Thirteenth Infallible, Hadhrat Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari, The Eleventh Imam

Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) was born in Medina in 232/846. His dignified mother, Susan or Salil, was a competent and virtuous woman who took extreme care to rear her son, the Hujja (proof) of Haqq as he really deserved. This pious lady accompanied Imam al-‘Askari (as) to Samarra and passed away there.

The patronymic of Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) was Abu Muhammad.

Countenance and Conduct of Imam al-Hasan ‘Askari (a.s.)

The eleventh Imam had a swarthy face and a moderate stature. He also had black curved eyebrows, large eyes and a broad forehead, as well as large and bright white teeth. He had a mole on his right cheek. Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) was attractively eloquent and of a divine and dignified personality, and was a matchless interpreter of the Holy Qur’an. In his short life, he clarified the straight path of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) and the appropriate way of interpreting the Qur’an to the people and particularly to his noble companions.

The Period of His Imamate

In general, the 29 year life-span of Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) is divided into three periods: The first period consisted of 13 years which was spent in Medina.

The second period included 10 years in Samarra before Imamate.

The third period covered the six years of the Imamate of his Holiness.

The Imamate period of his Holiness was contemporary with the superficial authority of the Abbasids, who imitated Harun in their ambitions to acquire and wield power.

During his six years of Imamate, Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) spent three years in prison. His jailor, Salih b. Wasif, assigned two tyrannical retainers over him so that he could further persecute him. The two retainers, however, closely observing the state and the manners of the holy Imam (as), were impressed by that noble Imam (as) and treated him in a peaceful and decent manner.

When asked about the Imam (as)'s state, these retainers said the prisoner fasted during the day and was engaged in prayers and supplications to his Beloved Allah all night long till dawn, not speaking to others.

'Ubayd Allah Khaqan, vizier to the Abbasid Mu'tamid, with all his arrogance, would always rise to his feet whenever he met Imam al-'Askari (as) and would offer him his own seat to sit on. He would always say: "I never saw anybody like him in Samarra, he is the most pious and knowledgeable man of the time."

'Ubayd Allah Khaqan's son said: "I always asked people about the state of the Imam. I would find people humble toward him and noticed them admitted to his nobility and would love him."

Although the Holy Imam (as) would not associate with others except his devoted Shi'as, the Abbasid ruling regime had him most of the time imprisoned and banned him from contact with others in order to maintain the caliphate in peace and quiet.

"One of the problems in the time of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) was that the property and endowments belonging to the Shi'as were trusted by the caliphate to the enemy of the Prophet's progeny so as to prevent the Shi'ite movements would not be financially strengthened. It is reported, for example, that Ahmad b. 'Ubayd Allah b. Khaqan was assigned by the caliph as the custodian of the endowments and alms in Qum. He inflicted the severest atrocities on the household of the Prophet (S).

Also, Imam 'Askari (as)'s companions were dispersed and it was impossible to gather in one place. Some like Abu 'Ali Ahmad b. Ishaq Ash'ari lived in Qum and others like Abu Sahl Isma'il Nowbakhti lived in Baghdad.

The pressure and surveillance exerted by the Abbasid caliphate following the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali al-Ridha (as) was so extensive that it had driven the opposite front into the most extreme challenges. Believing in the truth and calling to comprehensive principles of justice, the latter tolerated all the atrocities and hardships and never neglected to guard and defend their position."¹

That we said Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) was under intense control by the caliphate and not allowed to meet with people, and that all our noble Imams (as) would rarely associate with anyone except their devoted companions or those who referred to them to consult their financial and religious problems, was because the occultation of Imam al-Mahdi (as) was drawing near and people had to gradually get used to it and receive their political directions and solution to their problems from the devoted companions who were the flag-bearers of the religious frontiers, and not to find the occultation period astonishing.

Anyhow, Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) lived only 29 years, but during his six years of Imamate and the

spiritual leadership, he left behind significant works of the Qur'an interpretation, legal rulings, and clarification of jurisprudential issues, and directed the revolutionary movements of Shi'as who came to him from far distances to enjoy his favors and presence.

In the time of the eleventh Imam's leadership, the sublime Qur'anic teachings, dissemination of Divine ordinances, and theological disputes revived a particular scholarly movement. Similarly, the Shi'ite culture – which was already well known – in other fields such as philosophy and theology presented such great men as Ya'qub b. Ishaq Kindi, who was a contemporary and disciple of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as).

Many things have been related on the Imam (as)'s scholarly authority, which had been originated from the splendor of the Infallible Ahl al-Bayt (as)'s Divine knowledge. For example, the above-mentioned Ya'qub b. Ishaq al-Kindi the great Arab philosopher – to whom Abu Nasr Farabi, the well-known Iranian scholar, was a disciple – became helpless in a debate with the Holy Imam (as) and burnt up the book he had written against the Qur'an, and later on joined the lovers and followers of his Holiness (as).

The Martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as)

The martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) is reported to be on Friday, Rabi al-Awwal 8, 260/January 1, 874. The way that noble Imam (as) was martyred is related as follows: 'Ubayd Allah b. Khaqan's son said: "One day my father (who was the vizier to the 'Abbasid Mu'tamid) was informed that Ibn al-Ridha, i.e., Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) had fallen sick. Upon hearing this, my father rushed to the caliph to tell him the news.

The caliph sent five of his trustees and courtiers along with him. One of them, called Nahrir the retainer who was one of the special trustees to the caliph, ordered the rest to keep a constant watch over the house of that Holy Imam, and to keep him posted on the things happening to the Imam. He also assigned a physician to visit and check him every morning and evening.

After two days my father was informed that the Imam's illness had been deteriorated and weakness had overwhelmed him. So, early in the morning, he personally went to the Imam (as) and ordered the physicians – mostly Christian and Jewish – not to leave the Imam (as) and summoned the supreme judge and ordered him to bring ten well-known scholars to remain constantly in his company. He did all this in order to conceal from people the poison he had given him and to pretend to the people that his Holiness (as) had died a natural death.

They were continually in and around the Imam (as)'s house until a few days after the beginning of Rabi al-Awwal, 260/January, 874, when the tyrannized Holy Imam (as) gave up his carnal body and joined the Eternal Abode of Allah at the age of 29. Thereupon, the caliph launched a thorough search for the Imam (as)'s son, having heard that his son would one day dominate the entire world and overthrow the wrongdoers and false-minded. This search continued for two years.[2](#)

The inquiry and searching was the outcome of the fear nested in the heart of the Abbasid Mu'tasim and the caliphs before and after him regarding the advent of Imam al-Mahdi (as). They had heard through traditions related from the Holy Prophet (S) that a pure-natured child would be born to Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) and Nargis Khatun by the name of al-Mahdi of the End of the Time, who has the same appellation of the Holy Apostle (S), and would overthrow the despotic rule of the tyrannical powers and put an end to their domination and sovereignty. On this ground, they frequented the Holy Imam (as)'s house by various pretexts, looking around to find any possible sign of that noble baby in order to kill him.

Verily the story of Nimrud and Pharaoh in the advent of the Prophets Abraham (as) and Moses (as) was repeated. Even midwives were assigned to look into this crucial matter. But as you will read in the next chapter, Allah Almighty has secured His Hujja (proof) from receiving any harm by the enemies and any detriment from the inflicts of time; and He will keep doing so until he gets his Divine mission accomplished.

Anyway, the martyrdom of the Holy Imam (as) has been reported to be due to the poison Mu'tamid had fed him in his meal; later on, however, he repented for this sordid action. Perforce, he called for Christian and Jewish physicians who were practicing medicine then in Baghdad and Samarra, especially for the purposes like plotting the murder of such a noble Imam (as) as Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as). Nevertheless, he had other intentions by this ostentatious compassion, and that was pleasing people and keeping them unaware of the true event.

When the Shi'as were informed of the heart-rending demise of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as), the whole city of Samarra was overshadowed with deep sorrow and lamentation being heard from every corner. People prepared to carry out the funeral and mourning processions.

The Rightful Successor to Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as):

Abu al-Adyan said: "I was at the service of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as). I used to deliver his letters to various cities. One day, on his deathbed, he called me and gave me several letters to be delivered to Mada'in. Then he said: "You will return to Samarra only to hear wails and laments from my house; at that time my body will be given *ghusl* (major ablution)."

Abu al-Adyan said to the Imam (as): "O my master, whenever this tragic event occurs, to whom the Imamate shall be handed over?"

"Whoever demands from you the reply to my letter." The Imam answered.

Abu al-Adyan asked again: "Present me with another sign."

The Imam (as) said: "The one who performs funeral prayer for me."

Abu al-Adyan further requested: "Let me know one more sign."

The Imam (as) responded: "The one who can tell what is in the satchel will be your Imam."

Abu al-Adyan goes on to say: "The bravery and dignity of the Imam (as) was so awe-inspiring that I could not ask further questions. I set off to deliver the letters and returned in fifteen days. When I reached the door of the Holy Imam (as)'s house, a loud wailing and crying was heard from the house.

Once inside, I saw Ja'far Kadhdhab, the Imam (as)'s brother, sitting down and the Shi'as who were expressing their condolences to him and congratulating him on his Imamate. I was so surprised at this. I approached him and expressed my condolences and congratulations. He did not say anything and asked nothing.

When the sacred body of the Imam (as) was shrouded and prepared for funeral prayer, a retainer came in and called on Ja'far Kadhdhab to perform the prayer for his brother's body. When Ja'far stood up to say the funeral prayer, a very handsome child, with curly hair, wide apart teeth and swarthy face went toward him, held on the Ja'far's robe, and said : "O uncle step aside, for I am more deserved to perform the prayer."

Ja'far's face paled at the sight of his nephew. He stepped back, then the boy came to the front, said prayer for his father's body and then had the sacred body buried next to the grave of Imam 'Ali al-Naqi (as).

He then faced me and told me to hand him the answers to the letter that were with me. I gave the answers to that child. After a while, Hajiz Washsha' asked Ja'far who that child was. Ja'far said: "By Allah I do not know him and I have never seen him."

At this time, a group of Shi'as arrived in from the city of Qum. When they found out about the Holy Imam (as)'s death, the people present there beckoned them to ask Ja'far. Several of them went to Ja'far and inquired: "Tell us who the letters we are holding are from and how much the money is." Ja'far said: "Look people! They are asking me the knowledge of the hidden things! Thereupon a retainer of the Imam of the age (as) came along and quoted the Imam (as) as saying:

"O people of Qum! There are letters with you from so and so as well as a satchel in which there are a thousand gold coins and among them there are ten coins coated with gold."

The Shi'as who had come from Qum said: "Whoever has sent you is the Imam of the age (as). Hand in these letters and the satchel to him."

Ja'far Kadhdhab went to caliph, Mu'tamid, and related the event. The latter told his agents to search into the house of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) to find the child. They did so but of no avail. Perforce they arrested Sayqal, the woman retainer to Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (as) and kept her under arrest for a long time imagining that she was pregnant. But the more they searched the less they found.

Allah Almighty preserved that blessed and auspicious child who has been under His protection up to the

present time and is apparently hidden from views.^{[3](#)} May the praise of Allah keep showering upon him.

Some Sayings of His Holiness Imam al-‘Askari (as):

1. There are two attributes that have no superior: Believing in the Lord of the world and helping out brothers in faith.
2. No powerful authority gives up the Truth unless they fall into baseness and misery; and no miserable one sticks to the Truth unless they turned into powerful authorities.
3. How evil is the one who is double-faced and is double-tongued toward his brothers in faith; the one who praises them in their presence and reproaches and slanders them in their absence. If the same brother in faith is generous to him, he will envy him, and if he falls into trouble, he will betray him.
4. Anger is the key to all kinds of vices.
5. The most pious and most God-fearing people are those who abstain from the unlawful.
6. People attributing partners to Allah is more unnoticed than the movement of an ant on a black rock at a dark night.
7. Constantly remember Allah and death and attend to reciting the Qur’an and sending greetings to the Holy Prophet (S).
8. Acts of devotion are not merely restricted to fasting and saying prayers, but it also includes deliberating on the signs of the magnificence of God and the world of creation.^{[4](#)}

^{[1](#)}. Imam dar ‘Ayniyat-i Jami’a, p. 91.

^{[2](#)}. Imam dar ‘Ayniyat-i Jami’a, p. 92 (related from Muntahi al-Amal).

^{[3](#)}. Muntahi al-Amal, (with a slight change).

^{[4](#)}. Tuhaf al-‘Uqul ‘an Al al-Rasul, p. 516.

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