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Birth and Early Life

Al-'Abbas, was the first child of Umm-ul-Banin. With his birth, Medina shone and the whole world glittered. Waves of pleasures flowed in the family of 'Ali (a), for the birth of their magnificent moon that would enlighten this world with his merits, and would add immortal glory to the numerous glories of the Hashemites.

As soon as Imam 'Ali (a) was given the good news of the birth of this blessed child, he hurried to take him, kiss him frequently, and hold the Shariite ceremonies of newborns. The Imam (a) recited the azan[1] in his newborn's right ear and recited the iqama[2] in the left. Hence, the first voice that penetrated this great newborn's hearing was his father's, stating:

Allahu Akbar (*Allah is the Greatest*)
La ilaha illa (*A*)*llah* (*There is no god but Allah*)

These great words, which are the message of all prophets and the melody of the God-fearing, found a ground in the inner self of al-'Abbas. These words later on became the most significant element of his personality. In his future, he would adopt the calling to the true application of these words for which he would lose all his limbs.

On the seventh day of birth, Imam 'Ali (a) shaved the newborn's hair and gave golden and silver alms as weighty as the cut hair. As he had done for al-Hasan and al-Husayn, Imam 'Ali (a) slaughtered a ram as offering to God on behalf of his baby. These practices are adopted from the Prophet (S) whose words, practices, and confirmations are regarded as authoritative, together with the holy Koran, for Muslims.

Year of Birth

Historians[3] have confirmed that al-'Abbas was born on the fourth of Shabaan, AH 26.

Name

After holding the Islamic ceremonies of newborns for Imam 'Ali's new baby, Lady Zaynab (a) turned her

face towards her father and asked, “Father, have you chosen a name and a nickname for this new baby?”

Her father answered, “Yes, daughter, I have.”

“What are they, father?” she asked eagerly.

The father, as he perceived that this baby would be one of the heroes of Islam and would be frowning in the faces of evils and the wrongdoers, said, “I name him al–’Abbas (the frowning), and nickname him Abu’l–Fadhl (father of virtue).”[4]

Lady Zaynab however loved this baby very much and could not depart him for a single moment. She told her father about the different feelings that she had for this child.

Al–’Abbas in Arabic

Referring to the linguistic meaning of the Arabic al–’Abbas, Ibn–Manzhour[5] in his al–Ayn, writes down:

Al–’Abbas – the lion that other lions fear and escape[6]

In Muntaha al–Irab, the following is recorded:

Al–’Abbas – this name is given to the courageous, the fearless, the strong, and the attacker. It is one of the names of a lion. Describing al–’Abbas in the battlefields, many historians have likened him to the angry lion.[7]

Describing al–’Abbas ibn ‘Ali, at–Turaihi, in his al–Muntakhab, says:

Al–’Abbas ibn ‘Ali looked like an unshakable mountain. His heart was the same as such an immoveable mound because he was such a unique horseman and hero. In battlefields, he was fearless.

His Mother’s Verses

Out of her great love for her son, Umm–ul–Banin did her best to protect him from any evil, including the evils of the envious. Hence, she composed the following poetic verses:

I seek the guard of the One (God) for him
From the eye of every envious –
Including the rising one and those who sit
The Muslims and the unbelievers
The comers and the goers
And sons and fathers.[8]

Nicknames

Al–'Abbas was called Abu'l–Fadhl (father or owner of virtue). Some mentioned that he had a son called al–Fadhl.[9]

As a matter of fact, this name represents his personality completely, because he was the owner, leader, and a source of virtues. In his life, he was so openhanded – he used to distribute his virtue and charity to anyone who was directed to him.

After martyrdom, he has been the shelter and refuge of everyone who seeks his help. Most surely, God relieves him who turns to Him and implores to Him by using Abu'l–Fadhl as his means and interceder. Because this is so commonly experienced – the fact is undeniable.

Al–'Abbas was also called Abu–Qirba (the owner of the water skin) because he had carried water to the harem of Imam al–Husayn (a) during the battle of at–Taff.

He was also called Abu'l–Qasim. This name, however, is not common among historians some of whom have mentioned that al– 'Abbas had a son called al–Qasim who was martyred during the battle of at–Taff. Jabir al–Ansari addressed to al–'Abbas during the Ziyara of al–Arbaeen: [10]

"Salaam be upon you, Abu'l–Qasim. Salaam be upon you, O al–'Abbas ibn 'Ali."

Undoubtedly, Jabir was that great personality who spent much of his time in the house of prophecy and Imamate; therefore he was more knowledgeable than others in the secrets, affairs, and news of this holy house.[11]

Predictions

It is narrated that, once, Imam 'Ali (a) seated his baby al–'Abbas on his knees, lifted his (the baby's) hands, kissed them, and wept. Watching this situation, the mother was surprised. Hence, Imam 'Ali (a) told her about the future of her baby and what would happen to his hands. She as well as the others, wept heavily. After that, the Imam told her about her baby's great position with God, and this relieved her.[12]

Early Life

Al–'Abbas was nursed at the hands of a faithful, mother who nurtured him on faith, loyalty, knowledge, devoutness and high principles. His father too, was that great personality who is described as a copy of the Prophet (S), the inheritor of the prophet's knowledge and the hero of all combats.

Al–'Abbas was brought up under the custody of these parents. No wonder then that he possessed such a personality and offered such big sacrifices for the sake of his religion and principles.

Al–'Abbas adhered to his father when he was in Medina, and when he moved to Iraq and resided in Kufa, al–'Abbas was also under his thoughtful care and wise education. Through heredity, education and environment, al–'Abbas acquired all virtues, high moral standards, knowledge and conversance.

After his father's demise, al–'Abbas adhered closely to his two brothers – al–Hasan and al–Husayn (a). He returned with them to Medina and learnt from them the religious knowledge and fundamentals in addition to the nobilities of character.

When Imam al–Hasan (a) was poisoned to death, al–'Abbas adhered to his brother Imam al–Husayn and his nephew Imam 'Ali Zayn ul–Abidin (a). He kept himself with his brother in Medina, Mecca, and Iraq where he protected him as well as his harem until he lost his life for this sake.

Thus, unlike the other sons of Imam 'Ali (a), al–'Abbas had the characteristic of full adherence to his father, two brothers, and nephew. For that reason, he was a true copy of the Imams in knowledge and morality.

1. Azan (Announcement) is the Muslim call to the ritual prayers
2. Iqama is the prefatory statements of the ritual prayers
3. See Qamar Bani Hashim, 2/5 and Anees ush–Shia
4. However, some historians have reported another narration about the naming of Abu'l–Fadhl al–'Abbas:
Umm–ul–Banin swaddled her baby with a white piece of cloth and handed him to his father who held the Islamic ceremonies of newborns, kissed him, passed his hand on the baby's eyes, ears, and mouth – so that the baby would see, hear, and say nothing but the right.

Then, asked the mother, "Have you chosen a name for him?" "We will never precede you in such a thing," she said.

The Imam (a) said, "Well then, I choose for him the name of my uncle, al–'Abbas." He then embraced the baby to his chest, took the two small hands, and kissed them warmly while he was weeping. He then said, "I predict these two hands will be cut!"

See al–Kulbasi's Al– Khassaiss ul–'Abbasiyya, 71–2

5. Ibn–Manzhour is the compiler of the most famous Arabic–Arabic dictionary named Al–Ayn'
6. See Ibn Manzhour's al–Ayn, article: Al–'Abbas
7. See Muntaha al–Irab; article: al–'Abbas
8. See Al–Munammaq fi Akhbari Quraish, 437
9. See Sirr us–Salsala, Umdat ut–Talib, 356 and Maqatil ut–Talibiyyin, 84
10. Ziyara consists of words and practices said and done during the pilgrimage to the shrines of the Prophets, Imams, and saints. Ziyara of al–Arbaeen is the first visit of Jabir ibn Abdullah al– Ansari to the tomb of Imam al–Husayn (a) forty (Arbaeen) days after his martyrdom.
11. Al–'Abbas also had other nicknames such as Ibn–ul–Badawiyya (son of the Bedouin lady), Abu–Furja (source of relief) and Abush– Shara (owner of charisma)
12. See Qamar Bani Hashim, 21

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