

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Martyrdom

His holiness was under such heavy pressure and hardship that when he would return from the Friday Prayers, sweating and dusty, he would raise his hands to the sky and say: "O God! If my relief from what I am in lies in my death, hasten my death at this very moment!" He was constantly remorseful and discomforted until he passed away.^{[1](#)}

The night before his martyrdom, he sent for Harthama^{[2](#)} and told him: "Listen to what I say and memorize it; the time has now come for my return to God; it is time for me to join my ancestor and forefathers.

This rebel (Ma'mun) has decided to poison me with grapes and pomegranate; he has poisoned the grapes with thread and needle and will have the pomegranate seeded by a servant with poisoned hands. Tomorrow, he will call me in to eat from them and the destiny will be fulfilled..."^{[3](#)}

It is further related in the *hadith* that after the Imam's (a.s.) martyrdom, when Harthama told Ma'mun about the grapes and pomegranate, the latter's face now turned pale, now red, and then black, until he passed out and at the same time saying out loud: "Woe be to Ma'mun from God, Woe be to Ma'mun from the Prophet, Woe be to Ma'mun from 'Ali b. Abi Talib, Woe be to Ma'mun from Fatimat al-Zahra,...

And when he came to his senses, he told to Harthama: "I swear by God, neither you nor anyone else on the face of the earth or in heaven is dearer to me than Ridha; I swear by God that if I hear that you have told anyone else what you have heard from him, your death will be in that. Harthama promised that if he revealed anything, shedding his blood would be allowed for Ma'mun, who then made him swear and make a covenant to conceal it."^{[4](#)}

Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said to Aba Salt: "Go to the Harun's dome and bring a fistful of dust from each of its four corners. When Aba Salt returned with the dust, his holiness smelled the dust from behind the head corner and let it fall to the ground and said, 'Ma'mun wants to bury me here; but there will emerge a huge stone that if all the picks in Khurasan are brought here, they will not be able to move this stone.

Then, he smelled the dust taken from the upper part and the lower part [of the grave] and uttered the same words; and when he smelled the dust from the Qibla direction (in front of the Harun's tomb), he

said, 'Here they will dig up a grave for me...'

Then he said, 'O Aba Salt! Tomorrow I will go to this wicked sinner; if I came out with bare head, talk to me as I will answer; but if I came out with covered head, do not talk to me as I will not answer.'

Aba Salt said, "The next day his holiness put on his clothes and sat in his prayer niche waiting until Ma'mun's retainer came and summoned the Imam (a.s.). His holiness set off and I went along with him.

There was a basket of grapes and other fruits before Ma'mun and there was a bunch of grapes in his hands, some of which he had already eaten. As soon as he saw Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), he rose to his feet, hugged the Imam, kissed him on his forehead, and seated him in his own place. Then he offered the grapes to his holiness and said,

'O son of the Apostle of Allah! I have seen no better grapes than this.' His holiness answered: 'It is likely that the grapes are from the Paradise!'

Ma'mun said, 'Eat from them.' The Imam said, 'Spare me.' Ma'mun responded. 'There is no way. Why don't you eat? Are you accusing me or suspicious of me?' His holiness took the bunch and picked three grapes and threw the rest on the ground and stood up.

Ma'mun said, 'Where are you going?' The Imam said, 'Where you have sent me to.' Then, while his head was covered, came out and I (Aba Salt) did not talk to him. His holiness entered the house and lay down in his bed and ordered the house door to be closed.

I closed the door and sadly lingered on in the courtyard. All of a sudden I saw a charming black-haired youth who looked most like Imam al-Ridha (a.s.). I went toward him and said, 'How did you come in through the closed door?' he said, 'The One who brought me here from Medina at this moment, the same One took me in the house through the closed door.'

I asked who he was. He said, 'I am the proof of Allah to you O Aba Salt! I am Muhammad b. 'Ali (Imam al-Jawad).' Then, he went to his noble father.

As soon as Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) saw his son, he rose to his feet, hugged him, and kissed him on his forehead and showered kisses on him, talked to him in secret (about Imamate) that I did not understand... Then, his blessed soul joined the Garden of Divine pleasure.

Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) began to perform the funeral ablution for his father. I wanted to help, he said, 'There are some with me who would help.' Then he said, Go inside bring the coffin and the shroud and balm.'

He clad his father's body in shroud and performed the burial prayer over it.' Then, he said, 'Bring in the coffin.' I said, 'Shall I go to the carpenter to have a coffin made?' He said, 'No, go to the inner house, there is a coffin!'

When I went inside, I saw a coffin that I had not seen there before. He laid the body in the coffin and performed two *rak'as* of prayer; then, all of a sudden the ceiling opened up and the coffin ascended through the ceiling!

I said, 'O son of the Apostle of Allah! Soon, Ma'mun will come and ask me for Ridha, what shall I do?' he said, 'Silence! He will come back. O Aba Salt! There is no Prophet who would die in the East and his successor is in the West, unless God would call their souls and bodies together (i.e., his holiness has been taken to the Prophet).'

No sooner had his holiness stopped talking than the ceiling reopened and the coffin descended. Imam al-Jawad took the body of his father out of the coffin and laid it on the bed as if no funeral ablution and shrouding had been performed for it.

Then, he said, 'O Aba Salt! Get up and open the door for Ma'mun.' I opened the door and saw it was Ma'mun along with his retainers. That cursed devil (who had made sure of the Imam's martyrdom) entered while crying and tearing his clothes and beating on his head and saying: 'O my master, you pained my heart by your tragedy.' And it happened as Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) had predicted."⁵

According to more renowned traditions, the martyrdom of his holiness took place in the month of Safar/September of 203/818.

¹ Ibid, p. 14.

² Harthama b. A'ayan was a governor of the Abbasid period, a native of Khurasan. Fadhl b. Sahl, who had been described by Harthama as a majus accused him of committing acts of tyranny, had him arrested and imprisoned, with the caliph's approval and put him to death in Dhu 'l-Qa'da 200/June 816. Thus the above mentioned Harthama must be someone other than this famous Harthama b. A'ayan. (trans.)

³ Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 248.

⁴ Ibid, p. 253.

⁵ 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 244-245. (in brief)

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