

Martyrdom of Ahl al-Bayt

‘Ali al-Akbar

None remained with al-Husayn (‘a) except his Ahl al-Bayt who were determined to face death with their might and to maintain their dignity. They came bidding each other farewell¹ the first being Abul-Hasan² ‘Ali al-Akbar³ who was twenty-seven years old.

He was born on the 11th of Sha’ban, 33 A.H/653 A.D.⁴, and he was a mirror reflecting the Prophet's own beauty and a model of his own sublime code of ethics, a specimen of his wise speech. One poet of the Messenger of Allah (S) praised him saying:

Never have any eyes seen better than you
Never have women begotten more beautiful than you
Fault-free you have been made
As if you as you wished were made.

Al-Madih al-Akbar says⁵:

No eyes saw him have ever seen
Anyone walking, bare-footed or not.
Flesh boils till when it is ripe,
The eater finds it not expensive at all,
Whenever fire for it was lighted,
He with lofty honour ignited.
Just as a poor person sees it in hope,
Or a lone man with no family.

Never did he prefer his life over his creed,
Nor did he sell what is right for a misdeed.
I mean the son of Layla, the one of the dew,
I am describing the son of high lineage to you.

‘Ali al-Akbar is the one who branched out of the tree of Prophethood, the man who inherited the great merits. He was truly worthy of being a caliph had it not already been determined by the Lord of the Heavens. The most Glorified One had recorded their names in the tablet brought by Gabriel (‘a), to the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny.

He inherited the merits his legacy
From every valiant warrior and brave
In Hamzah's might, in Hayder's bravery
In al-Husayn's loftiness, in Ahmad's dignity
Good in make and in conduct,
Wise in speech like the Prophet Ahmad.[6](#)

Once he was about to start his role in defending Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), it rested extremely heavily for the ladies who grew up in the lap of Imamate because he was the one upon whom they rested their hopes for their protection and security, their only hope after al-Husayn (‘a) is gone.

One of them would see the Message about to be muted with his death, while another would see the sun of Prophethood nearing an eclipse, while yet another would see Muhammad's code of ethics coming to an end.

They all surrounded him and pleaded to him saying, “Have mercy on our being strangers in this land! We cannot bear your separation!”

But he did not pay them any attention because he could easily see how his enemies were to the end determined to spill his pure blood. He sought his father's permission then came out riding a horse belonging to al-Husayn (‘a) named Lahiq.[7](#)

From the camp of Layla, mother of ‘Ali al-Akbar and daughter of Maymuna daughter of Abu Sufyan,[8](#) a man shouted, “O ‘Ali ! You have kinship with the commander of the faithful Yazid, and we wish to safeguard it; so, if you wish, we can grant you security.”

He (‘a), said, “The kinship I have with the Messenger of Allah, peace of Allah and His blessings be upon him and his progeny, is now more worthy of being safeguarded,”[9](#) then he recited these *rajaz* verses, identifying his holy self and his sublime objective:

I am ‘Ali son of al-Husayn son of ‘Ali

We, by the House's Lord, are more worthy of the Nabi.

By Allah! We shall never be ruled by the *da'i*

With the sword shall I defend my family

And strike like a young Hashemi, Qarashi! [10](#)

Al-Husayn ('a) could not help flooding his eyes with tears [11](#) and shouted at 'Umar Ibn Sa'd: "What is the matter with you?!"

May Allah cut off your lineage just as you have cut off mine and just as you have not respected my kinship to the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, and may He send upon you someone to slay you on your own bed!" [12](#) Then he uncovered his hair and raised his hands to the heavens supplicating thus:

"O Allah! Bear witness against these folks that a man who looks most like Your Messenger Muhammad in his physique, manners, and eloquence [13](#) has come out to fight them! Whenever we missed seeing Your Prophet, we would look at him.

O Allah! Deprive them of the blessings of the earth, create dissension among them, and make them into many parties, and do not let their rulers ever be pleased with them, for they invited us to support us, then they transgressed on us and fought us!"

Then he recited the Qur'anic verse saying,

"Allah surely chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of Imran over all people, offspring of one another, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing (Qur'an, 3:34)." [14](#)

He kept charging at their right and left wings, diving in their midst. Whenever a group of fighters met him, he would repulse them, all of them, and whenever a brave man faced him, he would kill him:

He assaults the regiments as the ground closes in on them

All because of his fiery might,

So he forcibly sends them back on their tails

In his might he resembles the angry lion.

He killed a total of one hundred and twenty knights. Thirst took its toll on him, so he returned to his father to rest and to complain about suffering from thirst. [15](#)

Al-Husayn ('a) wept and said, "O help! How quickly shall you meet your grandfather who will give you a drink after which you shall never suffer of thirst." He gave him his tongue to suck then his ring to put in his mouth. [16](#)

He returns to bid farewell, and he is heavy-hearted,
His heart is thirsty, his iron is heavy,
His insides burn, his sword's thirst is quenched with dew,
But his own thirst was not, mind you.
Yet he with his saliva preferred him over his own self
Had only his saliva not dried yet.
As soon as he was bent to meet his death with a smile,
Death, from his ears and sight, stayed only for a while.
He turned the battle around and moved its grinding stone,
With his sword he struck their flesh and their bone,
With his withered shoulders he meets their braves
And places his sword in the necks of their knaves,
While on his body it leaves its mark
From their midst he disappeared and did not come back,
Mounting his steed though almost bare.
Time stumbled on him, so his body now
Is food for every sword and every bow.

‘Ali went back to the battlefield feeling very happy about the good news which he had just heard from the Imam, the Hujjah (‘a), who had told him that he would soon meet his grandfather, the chosen one, peace of Allah be upon him and his progeny.

He, therefore, advanced towards them with courage reminiscent of [his grandfather] Imam ‘Ali (‘a). He met the enemies face-to-face. The latter could not tell whether it was ‘Ali al-Akbar who was chasing the enemy or whether it was the *wasī* (‘a), roaring like a lion on the battlefield, or whether thunderbolts came emitting in an array from his sword. He kept killing the Kufians till the number of those whom he killed reached fully two hundred. [17](#)

Murrah Ibn Munqith al-‘Abdi [18](#) said, “I shall bear all the sins of the Arabs should I not succeed in causing his father to lose him for good!” [19](#) He stabbed him with his lance in the back [20](#) and hit him with his sword on the head, splitting it in half.

‘Ali embraced his horse that carried him to the enemy camp. There, he became the target of their swords, so they cut his body into bits and pieces. [21](#)

He wiped out shame, Allah fight the shame
A crescent in the dark, a shining one
The one sought by both houses of Hashim

The haven of both honour and loftiness
How could death to you reach?
You have not hesitated nor tarried.
May my life be for him a sacrifice
Like a fresh flower that dried
In the ocean of thirst and the heat of the sword.
Early did witheress visit his fresh flower,
Withering is the foe of a fresh flower.
By Allah! What a moon on them did he shine!
The sword mixed his substance with its gold,
The water of youth and the blood both flew
Within him, and his heart was still on fire.
Never shall I him forget
How he was turbaned with the youth of the deer
Among the warriors, wearing only their every spear,
Drenched in blood was he yet the Euphrates was
Turning green what was still black.

He called out saying, "Peace be upon you from me, O father of 'Abdullah![22](#) My grandfather has given me a drink with his own cup after which I shall never suffer any thirst, and he says that there is another one reserved just for you!"[23](#)

Al-Husayn ('a) came to him and placed his cheek on his as he said, "*There is no good in life after you... How dare they defy the most Merciful One, and how dare they violate the sanctity of His Messenger!*[24](#) *Hard it is upon your grandfather and father that they cannot respond to you when you call upon them, and that they cannot help you when you ask for their help.*"[25](#)

Then he took a handful of his pure blood and threw it towards the heavens. Not a drop of it fell. This explains the recitation in his *ziyarat* of the following statement:

"May my father and mother be your sacrifice! How you were slaughtered without having committed a crime! May my father and mother be your sacrifice! How your blood ascended to the one loved by Allah! May my father and mother be sacrificed for you!

He mourns you with a burning heart, raising your blood to the depth of the heavens, not a drop whereof returns, nor one sigh of your father finds an ease!"[26](#)

He ordered his servants to carry him to the tent. His corpse was brought to the tent in front of which they were fighting.[27](#)

The honourable ladies who grew up in the home of revelation kept looking at him as he was carried away with blood covering him with its red mantle of dignity. Stabs and wounds had spared no place in his body.

They welcomed him with very heavy hearts, their hair uncovered, their wailing deafening the world. Before them stood the wise lady of Banu Hashim, namely Zainab, the great one, daughter of Fatima daughter of the Messenger of Allah (S), crying and wailing.[28](#) She threw herself on the corpse of her nephew, hugging it, grief-stricken, for he was the guardian of her home and its pillar.[29](#)

My heart goes for the ladies of the Prophet
When thus they saw him in that condition.
Their wailing and their cries did intensify
So the minds and the souls were baffled by their cry.
The wise ladies mourned their protector
And so did virtues and merits.
My heart goes for her when she seeks
The Messenger's help,
The mountains were almost to disappear.
My heart goes for her since she lost
The one she could depend on,
And how can anyone equal the one she lost?
Who can in honour equal the one who was
Like in manners Yasin, like in form Taha?
O Allah help his father when
The light of al-Akbar went out.
He at the *Taff* saw the Friend of Allah from Mina,
The one whom he sacrificed was now
Sought by the swords.
He was mourned by what can be seen and what cannot
From the zenith of the 'Arsh
To the deepest of the earth
He was mourned by the master of all creation.
For his calamity was indeed the greatest of all.
He was mourned by the eyes of guidance and uprightness
And by the one appointed as the *wasi*.[30](#)

His father's condition could best be described thus:

Son! From my heart did I make you, so why

From me you now severed your tie?

Son! Your ties eclipse the hue of death

And the eclipse precedes perfection.

Son! Never shall I ever sleep

While your body on the burning sands lies.

Son! You insisted on reaching the heights,

Leaving for me only the dark nights.

Son! Men's eyes mourn you till the Day

Of Gathering and of Accounting.

Son! The attributes of perfection do you mourn,

And the tenderness of youth and the angels.

You rushed to meet your father the Prophet at the Pool

Having arranged the hearts of men's eyes.[31](#)

'Abdullah Ibn Muslim

After him 'Abdullah son of Muslim Ibn 'Aqil Ibn Abu Talib and Ruqayya, the great daughter of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali ('a),[32](#) charged as he recited this verse:

Today Muslim, my father, shall I meet

With a band sacrificed for the Prophet's creed.

He killed a number of the enemy troops in three of his assaults.^{[33](#)} Yazid Ibn al-Ruqad al-Jahni^{[34](#)} shot him with an arrow that he unsuccessfully tried to avoid with his hand, but it pierced his hand and found its way to his forehead.

He could not remove it from his forehead.^{[35](#)} He, therefore, said, "O Allah! They have found us few in number, so they humiliated us. Kill them, O Lord, as they have killed us." As he was thus engaged, a man threw a spear at him which pierced his heart, killing him instantly.^{[36](#)} Yazid Ibn al-Ruqad came to him, took out the arrow from his forehead as its tip remained inside.^{[37](#)}

^{1.} al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 26.

^{2.} On p. 14 of our dissertation of 'Ali al-Akbar, we quoted Imam Abul-Hasan al-Riḥā ('a) saying that he was married to a "mother of sons," hence his kunya "Abu [father of] al-Hasan" after his son by her, al-Hasan. His ziyarat, which is stated on p. 239 of Kamil al-Ziyarat of Ibn Qawlawayh, underscores this fact. Instructing Abu Hamzah, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq ('a) instructed the first to say: "Allah bless you and your progeny and family and bless your fathers, your offspring, and your mothers, the good ones from whom Allah removed all abomination and whom He purified with a perfect purification." "Offspring" implies a number of persons, at least two.

^{3.} In our dissertation on 'Ali al-Akbar, we quoted historians saying that he was older than Imam al-Sajjad ('a). We shall quote Zayn al-'Afif [al-Sajjad] recognizing this fact when we discuss the post-martyrdom events in a dialogue between the Imam ('a) and Ibn Ziyad.

^{4.} As quoted in Anis al-Shi'ah, a manuscript written by Sayyid Muhammad 'Abd al-Husayn al-Ja'fari al-Ha'iri which he wrote for sultan Fath 'Ali Shah.

^{5.} According to p. 32 of Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, this poem was written in memory of 'Ali al-Akbar ['Ali Senior].

^{6.} These verses and the ones to follow were composed by the authority Ayatullah Shaikh 'Abd al-Husayn Sadiq al-'Amili, may Allah sanctify him.

^{7.} According to p. 178 of Fadl al-Khayl by 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Dimyati (d. 805 A.H./1402 A.D.), one of al-Husayn's mares was named Lahiq, and on p. 183 the author says, "Al-Husayn son of 'Ali ('a), had a mare named al-Yamum and another named Lahiq upon which he carried his son 'Ali al-Akbar Ibn al-Husayn during the battle of the Taff where they were both killed."

^{8.} Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Al-Isaba, Vol. 4, p. 178, where the biography of Abu Murrah is discussed.

^{9.} Abu Nasr, Sirr al-Silsila, p. 57, in the discussion of genealogy in general and that of Mis'ab Ibn al-Zubayr of Quraish in particular.

^{10.} The rest of these verses are recorded by Shaikh al-Mufid, may Allah sanctify him, in his book Al-Irshad.

^{11.} Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan, p. 35. al-Mufid, Al-Irshad.

^{12.} al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 30.

^{13.} Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan. Ibn Tawus, Al-Luhuf. al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 30.

^{14.} al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 30.

^{15.} Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 47 (old edition). 'Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani, Maqtal al-'Awalim, p. 96. al-Naishapuri, Rawdat al-Wa'izin, p. 161. Ibn Shahr Ashub, Al-Manaqib, Vol. 2, p. 222 (Iranian edition). Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan, p. 35. Ibn Tawus, Al-Luhuf, p. 64 (Saida edition). al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 30.

^{16.} al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 31. 'Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani, Maqtal al-'Awalim, p. 95. According to p. 51, Vol. 2, of al-'Abbasi's book Ma'ahid al-Tansis, when Yazid Ibn Mazid al-Shaybani was pursuing al-Walid Ibn Tarif, and when thirst took its toll on him, he put his ring in his mouth and kept pursuing al-Walid till he stabbed him with his lance. In his book Al-Kafi, al-Kulayni quotes Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq ('a) saying that it is all right for a fasting person to suck on his ring. Such is the fatwa of religious scholars.

It is possible one of the reasons for it is that it stimulates the glands; therefore, there is no particular function played by the ring but by what those glands do when a stone or such thing is put in the mouth.

[17.](#) al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 31.

[18.](#) Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil, Vol. 4, p. 30. al-Dinawari, Al-Akhbar al-Tiwal, p. 254. al-Mufid, Al-Irshad. Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan. Ibn Tawus, Al-Luhuf. According to p. 265, Vol. 6, of al-Tabari's Tarikh, his name is Murrah Ibn Munqith Ibn al-Nu'man al-'Abdi al-Laythi. On p. 95 of Maqtal al-'Awalim (of Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani), his name is given as Munqith Ibn Murrah.

[19.](#) al-Mufid, Al-Irshad. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 256.

[20.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub, Al-Manaqib, Vol. 2, p. 222.

[21.](#) al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 31. Maqtal al-'Awalim, p. 95.

[22.](#) Riyad al-Masa'ib, p. 321.

[23.](#) 'Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani, Maqtal al-'Awalim, p. 95. al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 31.

[24.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 265.

[25.](#) 'Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani, Maqtal al-'Awalim, p. 95.

[26.](#) Ibn Qawlawayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 239. This statement is supported by accurate Isnad and is taught by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq ('a) to Abu Hamzah al-Thumali. In our discussion of the Eleventh Night, we will refer to Sunni texts saying that the Prophet (S) used to preserve the blood of his Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and that of the Sahaba.

[27.](#) al-Mufid, Al-Irshad. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 256. al-Khawarizmi, Maqtal al-Husayn, Vol. 2, p. 31.

[28.](#) According to p. 256, Vol. 6, of al-Tabari's Tarikh and p. 185, Vol. 8, of Ibn Kathir's book Al-Bidaya, Hamid Ibn Muslim has said, "When 'Ali al-Akbar was killed, I saw a woman coming out of the tent crying, 'O nephew!' She went and fell on his corpse. Al-Husayn ('a) took her in his hand and brought her back to the tent. I asked about who she was, and I was told that she was Zainab [granddaughter of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny]."

[29.](#) According to p. 256, Vol. 6, of al-Tabari's Tarikh and p. 31, Vol. 2, of al-Khawarizmi's book Maqtal al-Husayn, Zainab daughter of Fatima ('a) came out screaming and fell on his corpse. Al-Husayn ('a) took her back to the tent. Should the head lady of those bereaved women, the lady who was trying her best to comfort them, come out in such a manner, can anyone expect that there were ladies who remained inside the tent?

[30.](#) Excerpted from an extemporal poem composed and delivered by Ayatullah Shaikh Muhammad Husayn al-Isfahani, may Allah sanctify him.

[31.](#) Excerpted from a poem by the authority Sayyid Mahdi al-Bahrani, may Allah have mercy on his soul.

[32.](#) On p. 45 of his book, he attributed the genealogy of Mis'ab Ibn al-Zubayr to Quraish, adding, "She is the mother of his brothers 'Ali and Muhammad."

[33.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub, Al-Manaqib, Vol. 2, p. 220.

[34.](#) His last name, as recorded on p. 238, Vol. 5, of Ansab al-Ashraf of al-Balathiri, is given as "al-Janbi".

[35.](#) Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 27 (Iranian edition).

[36.](#) According to both Al-Irshad and p. 256, Vol. 6, of al-Tabari's Tarikh, 'Amr Ibn Abi al-Sa'idi shot him with a couple of arrows one of which found its way to his heart. On p. 239, Vol. 5, of Ansab al-Ashraf of al-Balathiri, the name of the person who shot that arrow is said to be Yazid Ibn al-Ruqad al-Janbi.

[37.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 179.

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