

Imam Ali Ibn al Husayn (as)

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Shaykh al-Mufid

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Article

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(This is) an account of the Imam after al-Husayn Ibn Ali, peace be on them, the date of his birth, the evidence for his Imamate, the age he reached, (together with) the period of his succession, the time and cause of his death, the place of his grave, the number of his children and a selection from the reports about him.

The Imam after al-Husayn Ibn Ali, peace be on them, was his son, Abu Muhammad Ali Ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin, peace be on them. He also had the kunya Abu al-Hasan.

His mother was Shahzanan daughter of Yazdigard Ibn Shahriyar Ibn Choesroe. Her name was also said to be Shahrbanawayh. The Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, had appointed Hurayth Ibn Jabir al-Hanafi over part of the eastern provinces. The latter had sent to him two daughters of Yazdigard Ibn Shahriyar Ibn Choesroe. Of these he had given his son al-Husayn, peace be on him, Shahzanan and she bore him Zayn al-'Abidin (Ali Ibn al-Husayn), peace be on him. He had given the other to Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr and she bore him al-Qasim Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, so that these two (Zayn al-Abidin and al-Qasim) were maternal cousins.

Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, was born in Medina in the year 38 A.H. (658/9). He lived with his grandfather, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, for two years, with his uncle, al-Hasan, peace be on him, for twelve years, and with his father, al-Husayn, peace be on him, for twenty-three years. After his father, he lived a further thirty-four years and he died in Medina in the year 95 A.H. (713/4). At that time he was fifty-seven years of age. His Imamate was for thirty-four years. He was buried in al-Baqi with his uncle, al-Hasan Ibn Ali, peace be on them.

His Imamate was confirmed in several ways. One of these was that he was the most meritorious (afdāl) of the creatures of God, the Most High, after his father in traditional knowledge (ilm) and practice ('amal). The Imamate belongs to the most meritorious (afdāl) to the exclusion of the less meritorious (mafdul) by rational proofs. Among these there was the fact that he was more appropriate for authority by virtue of his father, al-Husayn, peace be on him, and more entitled to his position after him through his merit and lineage. The one who was entitled through the last Imam has more right to his position than anyone else through the evidence of the verse of next of kin (dhu al-arhām) and the (Qur'anic) story of Zacharia, peace be on him.

Another of (the facts which confirms his Imamate) is the necessity according to reason of the Imamate existing in every age. The claim of every (other) claimant to the Imamate during the time of Ali Ibn al-

Husayn, peace be on them, was invalid and the impossibility of there being any time without an Imam is confirmed by him (being the Imam).

Another (of the facts which confirms his Imamate) is the fact that the Imamate is established in the offspring (itra) (of the family of Ali exclusively by rational deduction and by a report on the authority of the Prophet, may God bless him and his family. Invalidity of the arguments of those who claim it for Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya, may God be pleased with him, through him (also) belonging to the offspring is established by the absence of the designation of it to him.

Therefore it is established that it belongs to Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, since there was no claim for it for any other member of the offspring (of the family) except Muhammad, may God be pleased with him; his exclusion from it was on account of what we have already mentioned.

Another (of the facts which confirmed his Imamate) was the designation of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, of him for the Imamate, in the tradition which is related concerning the tablet (lawh) which Jabir reported on the authority of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family. Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Baqir, peace be on them, (also) related it on the authority of his father, on the authority of his grandfather, on the authority of Fatima, daughter of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family.

His grandfather, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, designated him during the life-time of his father, al-Husayn, peace be on him, according to the reports which include that. The testamentary bequests (wasiyya) (were made) by his father, al-Husayn Ibn Ali, peace be on him, and they were deposited with Umm Salama for him. He received them when his father died. His father made the request (for these) from Umm Salama, the sign of the Imamate of the one who should request them among men. This part may be known by the examination of the reports and we do not intend in this book to speak about its significance for we will study it thoroughly separately.

A Brief Survey of the Reports about Ali Ibn al-Husayn, Peace be on them

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yahya informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told us: Idriss Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yahya Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Hasan Ibn Hasan, Ahmad Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Musa, and Ismail Ibn Yaqub, all told me: Abd Allah Ibn Musa told us on the authority of his father (Musa Ibn Abd Allah), on the authority of his grandfather (Abd Allah Ibn al-Hasan), who said:]

My mother, Fatima, daughter of al-Husayn, peace be on him, used to tell me to sit with my maternal uncle, Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. I never sat with him without rising with some good which I had derived from him, whether it was fear of God which occurred in my heart when I realised (what) fear of God (was) or some traditional knowledge (ilm) which I acquired from him.

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Alawi informed me on the authority of his grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan), on the authority of Muhammad Ibn Maymun al-Bazzaz, who said: Sufyan Ibn Uyayna informed us on the authority of Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, who said:]

Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, who was the best Hashimi we ever met, said: "Love us, for it is love for Islam. May your love for us never cease even if it becomes a public disgrace."

[Abu Mu'ammarr reported on the authority of Abd al-Aziz Abu Hazim who said:]

I heard my father say: "I have never seen a Hashimi more meritorious (afdal) than Ali Ibn al-Husayn."

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yahya informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told me Abu Muhammad al-Ansari told me: Muhammad Ibn Maymun al-Bazzaz told me: al-Hasan Ibn Alwan told us on the authority of Abu Ali Ziyad Ibn Rustum, on the authority of Sai'd Ibn Kulthum who said:]

I was with al-Sadiq Jafar Ibn Muhammad, peace be on them. He mentioned the Commander of the faithful, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on him, and praised and extolled him with (praise) which he was worthy of. Then he said: "O God, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on him, never ate anything forbidden in this world until he passed along his (final) road. Two alternatives were never presented to him, when God would be pleased with both, without him taking the more religious of them. No dispute occurred about the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, without him being summoned as a reliable authority.

No one else of this community was able to do the work of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family; for if he enjoined (such a) man (as Ali) to work, his position would be between Heaven and Hell, hoping for the reward of the former and fearing the punishment of the latter. He freed a thousand slaves with his own money in his desire to seek the face of God and to escape the fire of Hell, (money) which he had laboured for with his own hands and for which his own brow had sweated, even though it had been to provide his family with oil, vinegar and dates. He did not have (many) clothes except white cotton fabrics since when there was any sleeve left over his arm, he called for scissors and cut it off.

None of Ali's children or his family was more like him and nearer to him in manner of dress and understanding than Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. (One day) his son, Abu Jafar (Muhammad al-Baqir), peace be on them, came to him. He had carried out in worship what no one had ever carried out. He saw that his colour had gone yellow from weeping all night; his eyes had used up all their water from being awake all night; his forehead was bruised and his nose squashed from prostrating; and his legs and feet were swollen from standing in prayer.

Abu Jafar, peace be on him, reported:

I could not control myself from weeping when I saw him in that state and I wept, may God have mercy

on him. Behold, he was thinking and he turned to me a short time after I had come and said: 'My son, give me some of those parchments in which there is the (practice of) worship of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on him.'

I gave them to him and he read something from them for a while. Then he let them go from his hand in exasperation and said: 'Who is strong enough to perform the worship of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on him?'

[Muhammad Ibn al-Husayn reported: Abd Allah Ibn Muhammad al-Qurashi told us:]

When Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, used to perform ritual ablutions, his skin would turn yellow.

"What is it that has afflicted you?" his family asked him.

"Don't you know Whom you are preparing to stand before?" he asked.

[Amr Ibn Shamir reported on the authority of Jabir al-Jufi on the authority of Abu Jafar, peace be on him:]

Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, used to pray a thousand rakas during the day and the night. The wind would bend (his body) forward like an ear of corn.

[Sufyan al-Thawri reported on the authority of Ubayd Allah Ibn Abd al-Rahman Ibn Mawhib:]

The great merit (fadl) of Ali Ibn Husayn, peace be on them, was mentioned to him but he replied: "It is sufficient for us that I should be one of the righteous members of our people."

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed us on the authority of his grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan), on the authority of Salama Ibn Shabib, on the authority of Ubayd Allah Ibn Muhammad al-Taymi who said: I heard a shaykh from (the tribe of) Abd al-Qays say: Tawus said:]

I (i.e. Tawus) went into the hijr one night and there was Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. He had come in and was standing praying. He prayed as God had wished then he prostrated. I asked a righteous man from the family of goodness whether I might listen to his prayer I heard him saying during his prostration:

Your little servant is at Your courtyard; Your miserable one is at Your courtyard: Your poor one is at Your courtyard; Your beggar is at Your courtyard.

(Tawus added:) I have never prayed with these words at any tribulation without me being freed from it.

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me on the authority of his grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan), on the authority of Ahmad Ibn Muhammad al-Rafi'i, on the authority of Ibrahim Ibn Ali on the authority of his father (Ali Ibn Abi Rafi'i), who said:]

I (i.e. Ali Ibn Abi Rafi'i) made the pilgrimage with Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. The camel carrying him was moving slowly. He pointed toward it with his stick and then said: "Woe if there was no retaliation (in the next world) !" And he moved his hand away from it.

[With this chain of authorities:]

Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, made the pilgrimage on foot and he took twenty days to travel from Medina to Mecca.

[Abu- Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told us: Ammar Ibn Aban told us: Abd Allah Ibn Bukayr told us on the authority of Zurara Ibn A'yan who said that:]

He (Zurara Ibn Ayan) heard a voice calling in the middle of the night: "Where are those who abstain with regard to this world out of desire for the next?" A voice called out in answer from the region (of the cemetery) of al-Baqi – he heard its voice without seeing the person

"Such a man is Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them."

[Abd al-Razzaq reported on the authority of Mamar on the authority of al-Zuhri, who said:]

I have never seen any of that House, meaning the House of the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, more meritorious (afdal) than Ali Ibn al- Husayn, peace be on them.

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told me: Abu Yunus Muhammad Ibn Ahmad told us: my father and another of our companions told me:]

A young man from Quraysh was sitting in an assembly with Sa'd Ibn al-Musayyib and saw Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them.

"Who is that, Abu Muhammad?" the Qurash; asked Sa'id Ibn al- Musayyilbn

"That is the lord of worshippers (abidin), Ali Ibn al-Husayn Ibn Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on them," he answered.

[Abu Muhammad al-H. asan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told me: Muhammad Ibn Jafar and others told me:]

A man from his House stood in front of Ali Ibn al- Husayn, peace be on them, and made him listen to him and cursed him. However, he did not reply. When (the man) had gone away, he said to those who were sitting with him: "You heard what that man said? I want you to come with me so that you may hear from me my reply to him."

"We will do that," they replied, "we wanted you to answer him while we were speaking (together)."

He took his shoes and went, while reciting:

Those who refrain from anger and those who forgive the people, God loves those who do good.
(3: 133)

Then we knew that he would not say anything to him.

He went along until he came to the house of that man who had screamed at him.

“This is Ali Ibn al-Husayn,” they told him.

He came rushing out towards us with evil intent. He had no doubt that (Ali Ibn al-Husayn) had come to him to repay him for some of the evil which he had given him.

“Brother,” said Ali Ibn al-Husayn, “you were standing proudly over me and you said this and that. If you have said what is (really) in my (character), I seek God's forgiveness for it. If you have said what is not in my character, may God forgive you”.

The man kissed him between the eyes and replied: “Yes, I said what was not in your character, may I be worthy of it (i.e. God's forgiveness)”.

[The narrator of the account added:] The man was al-Hasan Ibn al- Hasan, may God be pleased with him.

[Al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me on the authority of his grandfather, (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) who said: A Shaykh from Yemen who was some ninety years old, told me: A man called Ubayd Allah Ibn Muhammad informed me: I heard Abd al-Razzaq say:]

A maid-servant of Ali Ibn al-Husayn began to pour water for him so that he might perform the ritual ablutions for prayer. The maid-servant became faint and the jug dropped from her hand and struck him. He raised his head towards her and the maidservant said to him:

“God, the Most High, says: Those who restrain from anger.”

“I have restrained my anger,” he replied.

“And those who forgive the people,” she went on.

“May God forgive you,” he said.

“God loves those who do good,” she said.

“Go, you are a free woman before the face of God, the Mighty and High,” he answered.

[Al-Waqidi reported: Abd Allah Ibn Muhammad Ibn Umar Ibn Ali, peace be on him, told me:]

Hisham Ibn Isma'il used to harm our neighbourhood. Ali Ibn al- Husayn, peace be on them, received severe hardship from him. When he was dismissed, al-Walid ordered that he should be made to stand before the people. Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, walked past him and greeted him. Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, had come especially so that no one should harm him.

It is reported that Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, called his slave twice and the latter did not answer him. At the third time, he answered.

"Didn't you hear my voice?" asked (Ali Ibn al-Husayn).

"Yes," was the reply.

"What was on your mind so that you did not answer me?" he asked.

"I was safe (from any harm) from you," he answered.

"Praise be to God," he said, "Who has caused my slave to be safe (from any harm) from me."

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yahya informed me: my grandfather (Yahya al-Hasan) told me: Yaqub Ibn Yazid told us: Ibn Abi Umayr told us on the authority of Abd Allah Ibn al-Mughira, on the authority of Abu Ja'far al-Asha, on the authority of Abu Hamza al-Thumali, on the authority of Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, who said:]

I (i.e. Ali Ibn al-Husayn) went out until I came to that wall and leaned against it. There was a man wearing two white garments who was looking at me directly in the face. Then he said: "Ali Ibn al-Husayn, why do I see you sorrowful and sad? Is your sorrow on account of the world, since God provides for both the pious and the profligate?"

"I am not sad on account of that though it is as you say," I replied.

"Is it on account of the next world, for it is a true promise that there conquering angels will give judgement?" he asked.

"I am not sad on account of that. though it is as you say," I answered.

"Then why are you sad?" he asked.

"I am fearful of the discord (caused) by Ibn al-Zubayr," I replied

He laughed and said: "Ali Ibn al-Husayn, have you ever seen anyone who trusted in God and God was not sufficient for him?"

"No," I replied.

"Ali Ibn al-Husayn," he said, "have you ever seen anyone who feared God without God saving him?"

“No,” I replied.

“Ali Ibn al–Husayn,” he asked, “have you ever seen anyone ask (for something) of God without God giving it to him?”

“No,” I replied. Then I looked and suddenly there was no one here .

[Abu Muhammad al–Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al–Hasan) told us: Abu Nasr told us: Abd al– Rahman Ibn Salih. told us: Yunus Ibn Bukayr told us on the authority of Ibn Ishaq, who said:]

There was in Medina such and such a family. Their provisions used to come to them without them asking for them. They did not know >From where they came to them. However, when Ali Ibn al–Husayn, peace be on them, died, they stopped (receiving) those.

[Abu Muhammad al–Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al–Hasan) told me: Abu Nasr told us: Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Abd Allah told us: my father told me: Abd Allah Ibn Harun told us: Umar Ibn Dinar told me:]

Death was close to Zayd Ibn Usama Ibn Zayd and he began to weep.

“What makes you weep?” asked Ali Ibn al–Husayn, peace be on them.

“What makes me weep,” he said, “is the fact that I owe fifteen thousand dinars and I have not left anything to fulfil the debt for them.”

“Do not weep,” Ali Ibn al–Husayn, peace be on them, told him, “they are my debt now and you are free of them.” So he paid them for him.

[Harun Ibn Musa reported: Abd al–Malik Ibn Abd al–Aziz told us :]

When Abd al–Malik Ibn Marwan succeeded to the caliphate, he returned the (proportion of) taxes (sadaqat) given to the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, to Ali Ibn al–Husayn, peace be on them, and also (the proportion of) taxes (sadaqat) given to Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be on him. They were both written down (in the diwan as going to Ali Ibn al–Husayn). Umar Ibn Ali went to Abd al–Malik and complained to him on behalf of himself. Abd al–Malik replied, “I can only use the words of Ibn Abi al–Huqayq:

Indeed when claims of desire are put forward, the listener listens to the speaker.

The people wrestle with their hearts but we are judging with a just and decisive judgement.

We do not make the false true, nor do we deny the true in favour of the false.

We fear that we would make our minds foolish and we would spend (our) time with those without repute.

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me: my grandfather (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) told me: Abu-Jafar Muhammad Ibn Isma'il told us:]

Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, made the pilgrimage and the people were shouting about his comely disposition and looking at him. They began to question each other: "Who is that? Who is that?"

(They were doing this) in magnification of him and in exaltation of his rank. Al-Farazdaq was there and he composed the following, saying:

This is he whose ability the valley (of Mecca) recognises, and whom the (Sacred) House recognises (as do) the sanctuary and the area outside the sanctuary (al-hill).

This is the son of the best of all God's servants. This is the pure pious man, the pure eminent man.

When he comes to touch the corner of the wall of the Ka'ba, it almost grasps the palm of his hand.

He takes care to be modest and he is protected from his terror.

He only speaks when he smiles.

None of mankind has within their souls such primacy as he does nor such grace as he does.

Whoever knows God, knows his friend (wali). Religion is from the House of this man.

When Quraysh saw him, their spokesmen told of the outstanding qualities of this man which indicate (his) nobility.

[Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad informed me on the authority of his grandfather, (Yahya Ibn al-Hasan) who said: Dawud Ibn al-Qasim told us: Al-Husayn Ibn Zayd told us on the authority of his uncle, Umar Ibn Ali, on the authority of his father Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them:]

(Ali Ibn al-Husayn) used to say: "I have never seen similar preference (given to) a prayer (than this prayer). The worshipper will never pray without an answer coming to him on every occasion."

It was one of the prayers learned from him, peace be on him, when it was learned that Musrif Ibn Uqba was heading towards Medina.

My Lord, however much favour You have bestowed upon me, my thanks to You for it have been little. However much testing You have given me, my endurance in the face of it has been little. O He who receives little thanks from me for His favour, let Him not deprive me. O He Who receives little endurance from me when He tests me, let Him not desert me. O Possessor of unceasing kindness ! O Possessor of incalculable favours, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad; ward off the evil (of man) from me

so that I may find protection through You amid (man's) slaughter. I seek refuge with You from (man's) evil.

Musrif Ibn Uqba came to Medina. It was said that he did not have any hostility towards Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. He greeted him, honoured him, was generous to him and gave gifts to him.

The account from another source is that when Musrif Ibn Uqba came to Medina, he sent for Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them. The latter went to him. When he came to him, he honoured him and said:

“The Commander of the faithful (i.e. Yazid) has enjoined me to show goodness and generosity towards you, to distinguish you from the others.”

So he treated him very well. Then he said to those who were around him: “Saddle my mule for him.

Then he said to him: “Go to your family. I see that we have filled them with fear when we made you come to us. If that with which we might increase your gift according to your right, were in our hands, we would give it to you.”

“Do not apologise for the ruler (amir) to me,” said Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them and rode away.

“That is the best of men,” said Musrif to those who were sitting with him. “There is no evil in him because of his position and rank from the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family.

The account has been reported that one day Ali Ibn al-Husayn, peace be on them, was in the mosque of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, when he heard some people describing God in terms of His creation. He became fearful and frightened of that. He rose and went to the tomb of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family. He stood before it and raised his voice to talk to his Lord. He said in his conversation to Him:

My God, Your power has been shown but the form of Your Majesty has not been shown. They are ignorant of You and they try to estimate You on the basis of what You are not, and they make comparisons with You. O my God, I renounce those who seek to discover You through human comparisons. My God, there is nothing like You, and they have not become aware of You.

It is clear that the favour which they have is their evidence for You, if they would (choose to) know You in Your creation, My God, I am free from the fact that they should give You (these characteristics). Indeed they have pictured You according to Your creation. Thus they do not know You and have adopted some of Your signs as (if they were their) Lord. In that way they have attempted to describe You. May You be exalted, O my God above the pictures of You of those who try to describe You in human terms.

This has been a sample of the accounts which are given about the virtues of Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him.

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