

In the name of

Allah,

the Beneficent,

the Merciful

Al-Furqān

the bi-weekly electronic newsletter from the office of
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

O Allah,

Bless

Muhammad

& his progeny

BROTHERHOOD, COURAGE & LOYALTY IN 'ABBĀS BIN 'ALI

*Transcript of a speech delivered on the 1400th birth anniversary of Hazrat 'Abbās bin 'Ali (a.s.)
at the Ja'fari Islamic Centre, Canada
on 12th Sha'bān 1426 / 17th September 2005*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

و الصلاة والسلام على محمد سيد المرسلين و آله الطاهرين

Introduction

Who was 'Abbās whose 1400th birth anniversary is being celebrated today? To the Muslims, 'Abbās is known in different ways: as the lion of 'Ali, the hero of Karbala, the flag-bearer of Husayn, the beloved brother of Zaynab, and the loving uncle of Sakina. However, for the benefit of our respected guests, I would briefly describe the event of 'Āshūrā'.

'Abbās was the son of Imam 'Ali, the first Shí'a Imam and successor of the Prophet. He was brother of Imam Husayn. Fifty years after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, stood up against Yazid, the tyrant ruler of the time, and refused to pledge allegiance to him. As a result of this protest, Husayn, his family-members, and a small group of his companions were surrounded by Yazidi forces in the desert of Karbala, prevented from water for three days, and, finally, on the Day of 'Āshūrā', Husayn with about 100 souls faced an army of 25,000 soldiers. They were given the choice of pledging allegiance to Yazid or face death. In that uneven battle, Husayn chose an honourable death over a disgraceful life under a tyrant like Yazid.

It was in that historical event, that 'Abbās was made the commander-in-chief and flag-bearer of Husayni forces. That battle-field gradually turned into a place of pilgrimage, and today the shrines of both these brothers, with their golden domes, form the sky line of Karbala in Iraq.

By his supreme sacrifice, 'Abbās became a universal soul that transcends time and space. The organizers have rightly chosen the three virtues of **brotherhood, courage and loyalty** as the theme of my talk since these qualities perfectly blend into the personality of 'Abbās bin 'Ali.

Brotherhood

Let us start with concept of brotherhood: Brotherhood can be understood on two different levels, a physical and personal level, and a spiritual and social level. Both aspects are important.

However, the brotherhood based on blood relationship should be synchronized with the brotherhood based on spiritual relationship. In case of tension between the two relationships, the spiritual brotherhood will take precedence over the physical brotherhood. ("Verily the believers are brethren [of one another]." 49:10) Imam Zaynul 'Ābidīn, the Fourth Imam of the Shí'as and a nephew of 'Abbās, in his famous *the Charter of Rights*, writes about the rights of a brother: he says brothers should consider one another as a source of support and protection, and they should be sincere in giving advice and helping one another towards the path of God. He concludes by writing: "...Then if he obeys his Lord and properly answers His call [it is good for all]; otherwise, Allah, rather than your brother, should be your choice and the object of your reverence."

It is human nature for two brothers to love and support one another. Almighty God tends to leave natural issues to nature and does not talk about it that much, and only points out issues when humans deviate from their nature. On brotherhood,

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Tel: (905) 707-0982 muhammad57@rogers.com Fax: (905) 737-9781

there are two negative examples in the Qur’ān: the example of Qābīl (Cain) who murdered his brother Hābīl (Able); and the brothers of Yūsuf (Joseph) who conspired to get rid of him. In the scale of zero to ten, we can put Qābīl’s relationship at zero and that of Yūsuf’s brothers at three—on the positive side, we can surely put the relationship of ‘Abbās to Imam Husayn at ten.

The devotion of ‘Abbās to Husayn was not just on the physical level, it was based on the spiritual level also. This is reflected in his statement to Shimr bin Dhil Jawshan. Shimr, one of commanders of the Yazidi forces, was related to ‘Abbās through his mother who was from the Kilābiyya tribe (while Husayn’s mother was the daughter of the Prophet). Shimr had come to Karbala with an *amān*, assurance of protection or amnesty signed by Iraq’s governor, for ‘Abbās and his three full brothers. When Shimr presented that *amān* to ‘Abbās, ‘Abbās responded by saying: “May God curse you and your *amān*. You give assurance of protection to us but the son of the Prophet’s daughter has no *amān*!”

‘Abbās bin ‘Ali’s message to us is quite clear: we have to strengthen the ties of brotherhood with fellow Muslims irrespective of their race, colour, language, or geographical location. All of us are brethren in faith; all other relationships must be synchronized with that. We should be able to feel the pain of one another as the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) once said, “Muslims are like one body: when one limb is injured, the hurt is felt by the entire body.”

Between ‘Abbās and Imam Husayn, this level of closeness and concern is symbolized in the words of Husayn: when he heard ‘Abbās calling for help as he was falling down from the horse, the Imam felt the pain and said, “Now, my back has broken and my options are few.”

الآن انكسر ظهري و قلت حيلتي

Courage

Moving on to the second virtue of the theme: What is courage? In Islamic ethics, courage is not defined by physical strength; courage means to have control over one’s emotions and feelings, and use them only for the right cause. A person who only relies on his physical strength and cannot control his emotions is not a courageous person, he is a foolhardy person.

While describing the Prophet and his true followers, Almighty Allāh says: “*Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are firm against the enemies but soft with their own.*” (48:29) Iqbāl, the famous poet of the Indian sub-continent, presents the same concept in his poetic style:

*In the struggle of truth, the believer is
as solid as the steel*

But in midst of his friends, he is as soft as the silk

‘Abbās was not the slave of his desires and emotions; even his courage was linked to the spiritual relationship: ‘Abbās was very stern and firm when he confronted the enemies but he was very kind, compassionate, and caring towards the good people. The children of Husayn and the family of Banū Hāshim adored him. He was the favorite uncle of Sakina, the four years old daughter of Husayn.

Unfortunately, what we see in the world today is that the tyrants, the kings and the generals, who rule the Muslim countries behave in the opposite manner: they are humble in front of the enemies but very bold when they deal with their own people and oppress them!

When Imam Husayn asked ‘Abbās to try and get water for the children, ‘Abbās confronted the enemy force and he was easily able to disperse them and got access to the river. ‘Abbās entered the river and filled the water-bag with water. On the way back, he had to pass through some palms trees and that is where the enemy was hiding behind the trees to attack him from the back. One of the Yazidi soldier attacked him from behind in such a way that he lost his right hand. ‘Abbās courageously got hold of the water-bag and consoled himself by the following poem:

By God, though you have severed my right hand

و الله ان قطعتم يميني

My faith, I will surely forever defend

اني احامي ابدًا عن ديني

I will defend the truthful leader of conviction

و عن امام صادق اليقين

The grandson of the pure and truthful Prophet

نجل النبي الطاهر الامين

Loyalty

Coming to the third of the three virtues of today's theme, we see that loyalty is a very important quality, especially the loyalty toward one's faith and community.

'Abbās' loyalty has become proverbial in the literature of Karbala. On the eve of 'Āshūrā', when Imam Husayn asked his friends and family-members to go away and leave him since the enemies were after his blood only, the first person to stand up and express his loyalty was 'Abbās bin 'Ali. He said, "And why should we abandon you? So that we may live after you! May God not show us such a day ever."

On the day of 'Āshūrā', when Imam Husayn asked him to get water for the children, he succeeded in gaining access to the stream. He galloped into the stream, got down and filled the water-bag. As a person who had been thirsty for three days, 'Abbās could have quenched his thirst but he did not do so. Legally as well as morally, nothing prevented him from drinking water. But he did not do so. It was his sense of loyalty to Imam Husayn and the love for Husayn's children that prevented 'Abbās from drinking the water.

While filling the water, he recited the following poem:

*While Husayn is drinking the syrup of death
You are imbibing the coolness of joy*

هذا الحسين شارب المُنُونِ
وتشربين بارد المَعِينِ

When you look at the flag of 'Abbās, you always see that a water-bag is attached to it, hanging on to it. It reminds us of the loyalty of 'Abbās to Husayn and his children.

That flag challenges us to be loyal and true to our faith and its values. It urges the followers of 'Abbās to stand up against oppression, tyranny, and injustice in whatever shape or form that we see in our own times. All in the name of God and to serve the cause of God.

And so we end with a tribute to 'Abbās in the famous words of the Sixth Imam who praised him by saying:

"I bear witness that you submitted [to your Imam], affirmed [his truth], and were loyal and sincere [to him]."

اشهد لك بالتسليم والتصديق والوفاء والنصيحة

'Abbās bin 'Ali

<i>Father:</i>	Imam 'Ali bin Abi Tālib (a.s.)
<i>Mother:</i>	Fātima bint Hizām al-Kilābiyya; married Imam 'Ali circa 25 AH. She was known as Ummul Banin, mother of the sons. Al-Kilābiyya was a tribe known for its courage and valour.
<i>Date of Birth:</i>	4 Sha'bān 26 AH at Medina.
<i>Martyrdom:</i>	10 Muharram 61 AH / 9 October 680 at Karbala.
<i>Titles:</i>	Abul Fazl; as-Saqqā' and Abul Qirba (water carrier); Hāmilul Liwā' (flag-bearer, 'Alamdār); Bābul Hawā'ij.
<i>Full Brothers:</i>	Hazrat 'Abbās had three full brothers: Ja'far, Uthmān, 'Abdullāh — all became martyrs in Karbala.
<i>Sons:</i>	Fazl and Ubaydullāh
<i>Decendents:</i>	From Ubaydullāh. Ubaydullāh had a son named Hasan. Hasan had five sons: 'Ubaydullāh (a judge in Mecca); 'Abbās (an orator); Hamzah al-Akbar; Ibrāhim (jurist and man of letters); Fazl (known for his eloquence and valour).