

8th Rabi al-Awwal; the Day of Grief

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Peace upon you, O the Representative of Allah, and the Son of Allah's Representatives; and"
the Father of His Representative... Peace upon you, O he who speaks with the Book of Allah..."

The above is a passage from the ziyarah or standard form of salutation to an Infallible Member of Prophet Muhammad's (SAWA) Household, at the news of whose martyrdom today in 260 AH (874 CE), according to contemporary accounts, the city of Samarra wore a deserted look,

as grief-stricken traders shuttered their shops and hurried to participate in his last rites.

This was the same Samarra, where since its inception as the capital of the vast Abbasid realm which stretched from the Atlantic coast of North Africa to the borders of China and India, none ever bothered to mourn the caliphs that used to be murdered with frequency, by their own sons

or by the elite neo-Muslim Turkish guards, who were the real power behind the caliphate.

So intense was the shock and grief of the populace that the murderous caliph, Mo'tamed, who administered a fatal dose of poison to this venerable descendant of the Prophet, dare not

publicly admit his crime.

He and his predecessors had subjected Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS) to bouts of imprisonment and placed him under virtual house arrest, before taking his life in the prime of his youth,

because they considered him as 'existential threat'.

In other words, although he had no army or material wealth, his life – like that of his father before him – was regarded by the Abbasids as a mortal danger to their survival, especially since he was 11th in line of descent of the Ahl al-Bayt. This meant the figure of 12 was too close for comfort for the regime, which was well aware of the Prophet's hadith of Twelve Infallible Successors, the last of whom would rise as Qa'em al-Mahdi (AS) to end corruption and oppression on earth by establishing the world government of peace, prosperity and justice.

This was the reason that Imam Askari (AS), who was only 28 years old at the time of his martyrdom, was viewed by the caliphate as the ultimate threat to its existence, when all he did was to pray, fast, preach virtue, admonish against vices, teach forbearance and forgiveness, behave with admirable politeness, and strove to enlighten the ummah with the meaning of

God's Revealed Word, the holy Qur'an.

But did his death ensure the survival of the Abbasid regime, or for that matter the sordid system of caliphate that had begun at the scandalous gathering of Saqifa Bani Sa'da in Medina, where a group of the Prophet's companions violated the letter and spirit of the holy

Qur'an as well as the explicit instructions of the Seal of Divine Messengers by usurping the right to rule of Imam Ali ibn Abi Taleb (AS)?

These are indeed thought-provoking questions, not just related to the events of the past, but relevant to all ages, including our own times, where any system based on the dynamic legacy of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt is seen by the devilish powers of the day as "existential threat".

So great was the confusion in the ranks of the Abbasids in those days that prior to martyring Imam Ali al-Hadi (AS), six years earlier in 254 AH, they had martyred through poisoning in the lifetime of the 10th Imam his elder son, the youthful Muhammad (whose shrine is situated in Balad between Baghdad and Samarra) on the assumption that he might be the 11th Imam and the father of the promised Mahdi (AS).

God Almighty, however, protects His chosen ones. Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS), whom Imam Hadi (AS) had left behind in the Hejaz when forced to come to Samarra, was destined to be the 11th Imam. Unknown to the Abbasids, the 12th Imam was born in secrecy and was being brought up away from the prying eyes of the enemies of humanity.

During the six crucial years that he was the Representative of Allah on earth, Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS) spared no efforts to bequeath to the faithful the legacy of the Prophet by grooming a number of scholars and making foolproof the system of wikala or representation throughout the realm that would so wonderfully serve his son and successor during the critical period of .(Ghaybat as-Sughra (Lesser Occultation