The Faithful Commander of Imam Ali (a.s): Malik al-Ashtar

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But on the normal days, he looked a poor man. He wore simple clothing. He walked humbly. .Thus most people did not know him

One day, while *Malik al-Ashtar* was walking in the street, a foolish person was eating some dates and throwing the stones. Malik al-Ashtar passed before the foolish person. He threw a stone at Malik al-Ashtar. The stone hit him on the back. The foolish person began laughing at .him

Malik Ashtar, Malik ibn Ashter, Malek-e-AshtarA man saw the foolish person. He said to him: What are you doing? Do you know that man? The foolish person answered: No, who is he? He's Malik Ashtar commander-in-chief of Imam Ali's Army!

Malik Ashtar went on walking. He did not pay attention to the foolish person. He remembered how the polytheists treated Prophet Muhammad (saw) in Makkah. They threw dust and rubbish at him but he kept silent.

Malik Ashtar came into mosque. He began praying for Allah to forgive the foolish person. The man ran quickly. He came into the mosque. He embraced Malik Ashtar apologizing and saying: I want to apologize to you for my bad behavior! So, accept my apology.

Malik Ashtar answered with a smile: Brother, don't worry. By Allah, I've entered the mosque to pray for Allah to forgive you.

The Battle of Siffin: The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) chose the good persons to rule the cities. So, he appointed Malik al-Ashtar ruler over Mousal, Sinjar, Naseebeen, Heet, and Anat. They are areas on the borders of Shaam (Syria).

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan disobeyed the Caliph. He became a dictator in Shaam. The

Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) tried to persuade Muawiyah to obey him. He sent him several letters, sent some delegates to talk with him. But all the Imam Ali's efforts were in vain. Thus the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) formed an army and gave its leadership to Malik al-Ashtar.

The two armies met in the plain of Siffin on the banks of the Euphrates. Some units of Muawiyah's Army occupied the banks and besieged the river. That action was also contrary to the laws of Islam and the laws of war. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) sent Sasha bin Suhan, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), to Muawiyah to talk with him.

Sasha bin Suhan came into Muawiyah's tent and said: Muawiyah, Imam Ali says: "Let's take some water. Then we'll decide what's between you and us, otherwise we will fight each other till the victor drinks."

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan kept silent and said: I'll answer you later on. The Imam Ali's representative went out. Muawiyah asked the advice of some men. So al-Waleed bin Utbah said with spite: Prevent them from drinking water to force them to surrender.

They all agreed on this opinion. Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan gathered all the evil persons around him. They violated the laws of Islam and of human rights.

Malik al-Ashtar was watching the military movements on the river banks. He saw military supplies. So, he realized that Muawiyah would tighten the siege. The Imam Ali's soldiers became thirsty. Malik al-Ashtar became thirsty, too. So, a soldier said to him: There's only little water in my water-skin, please drink it.

Malik al-Ashtar refused that and said: I won't drink till all soldiers drink! Malik al-Ashtar went to the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) and said: Commander of the Faithful, our soldiers are very thirsty. We have nothing but fighting.

The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) answered: Yes.

The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) gave the soldiers a speech and urged them to fight bravely. Then he said: Death is that man is pleased with abasement. And life is that man who dies and becomes a martyr.

Malik al-Ashtar led the first attack at the Battle of Siffin. And he began fighting bravely. So, he advanced towards the banks of the Euphrates. After violent clashes, Malik al-Ashtar could recapture the river banks and force Muawiyah's Army to withdraw. Muawiyah's Army became far from water.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan was so worried that he asked Amr bin Aas: Do you think Imam Ali will prevent us from drinking water? Amr bin Aas answered: Imam Ali doesn't do as you do!

Muawiyah's soldiers were worried, too. Immediately, the soldiers heard that the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) allowed them to come to the river to drink water. Some people from Shaam realized the difference between Muawiyah and the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as). Muawiyah did every evil action for victory. But the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) did not think about that at all. He conformed to the human, good, ideal behaviour.

The clashes became intense. Ammar bin Yasir was leading the left wing of the Imam Ali's Army. When the sun was about to set, Ammar bin Yasir, may Allah be pleased with him, requested some food to break the fast.

A soldier brought him a cup full of yoghurt. Ammar bin Yasir became cheerful and said: Tonight, I may he martyred because Prophet Muhammad (saw) has said to me: Ammar, the unjust group will kill you, and your final drink in the world will be a cup of yoghurt.

Ammar bin Yasir broke his fast and advanced towards the battlefield. He fought bravely. Then he fell over the ground and became a martyr.

The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) came and sat near Ammar bin Yasir's head and said sadly: May Allah have mercy on Ammar on the day when he became a Muslim, may Allah have mercy on Ammar on the day when he became a martyr, may Allah have mercy on Ammar on the day when he will be raised from the dead! Ammar enjoy your garden!

Ammar bin Yasir's martyrdom in the battlefield affected the course of the battle very much. The Imam Ali's Army was in high spirits. In the meantime, Muawiyah's Army was in low spirits. All Muslims memorized the tradition our Prophet Muhammad (saw) said to Ammar bin Yasir. The tradition is as follows: Ammar the unjust group will kill you. All understood that Muawiyah and his soldiers were wrong and that Imam Ali and his companions were right.

Thus the Imam Ali's Army attacked Muawiyah's Army increasingly. Therefore, Muawiyah and his army were getting ready to escape. Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan thought about a new trick to cheat the Imam Ali's Army. So, he asked the advice of Amr bin Aas. Amr bin Aas said: I'm sure we can cheat them with the Noble Qur'an.

Noble Qur'an on spearsMuawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan rejoiced at the trick and ordered his soldiers to raise the Noble Qur'an on their spears. When the Imam Ali's soldiers saw the Noble Qur'an, they thought about stopping the battle. Thus Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan cheated many soldiers. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) said: It's a trick! I was the first to invite them to Allah's Book, Noble Qur'an. And I was the first to believe in it. They have disobeyed Allah and broken His promise.

But twenty thousand soldiers disobeyed the Imam Ali's order and said: Stop fighting and order

Malik al-Ashtar to withdraw! Then Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) sent a soldier to Malik al-Ashtar to stop fighting. But Malik al-Ashtar went on fighting. Then he said: We will get the final victory within few moments. The soldier said: But twenty thousand rebels are besieging the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as). If you go on fighting they'll kill him.

Malik al-Ashtar was forced to withdraw. So, he said: There's neither might nor power but with Allah. Malik al-Ashtar knew that Muawiyah's action was only a trick. But he obeyed the Imam Ali's order so as no disaster would happen. He was a brave leader and an obedient soldier. The fights stopped and the two parties agreed to the arbitration according to Allah's Book, Noble Qur'an.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan sent Amr bin Aas to represent him in the negotiations. And the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) wanted to choose an alert, wise man. A man who had a good knowledge of Allah's Book. So, he chose Abdullah bin Abbas, the religious scholar of the nation. But the rebels refused him and said: We'll choose Abu Musa Al-Ashari. So, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) advised them and said: I disagree with you on him. And Abdullah bin Abbas is better than he.

Again the rebels refused him. So, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) said: I'll choose Malik al-Ashtar. They refused him too. They insisted on Abu Musa Al-Ashari. To avoid a disaster, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) said: Do whatever you like! Thus the two representatives met to talk. Amr bin Aas thought about a way to deceive Abu Musa Al-Ashari. He said to him: Abu Musa Al-Ashari, Muawiyah and Imam Ali have caused all these troubles. So, lets dispose them and elect another man.

Abu Musa Al-Ashari did not like the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as). So, he agreed to the plan. He said before the people: I'm removing Imam Ali from the Caliphate as I'm removing my ring from my finger. Then he removed his ring.

But Amr bin Aas said spitefully: I'm fixing Muawiyah to the Caliphate as I'm fixing my ring to my finger Then he wore his ring. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) agreed with Muawiyah on the truce and stopping the battle for a year.

The Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) asked his fighters to be patient for the year. But they disobeyed him, too. So, they were called the Kharijites.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan thought about a way to control Egypt. So, he sent a big army to occupy it. The ruler of Egypt was Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr (the first Caliph's son). He asked the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) to send him urgent military supplies to prevent the invaders from occupying Egypt. So, Imam Ali (as) said to Malik al-Ashtar:

Malik, may Allah have mercy on you, go to Egypt. I've absolute trust in you. Rely on Allah! Use gentleness in its places and intensity in its place.

Malik al-Ashtar set out for Egypt.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan was worried about Malik al-Ashtar's going to Egypt, for he knew that Malik al-Ashtar would save it. So, Muawiyah thought about a way to kill him.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan used to mix honey with poison to kill his enemies. Muawiyah imported poisons from Rome. The Romans allowed Muawiyah to import them because they knew that he would use them to kill the Muslims.

Amr bin Aas said: I know a man. The man lives in al-Qilzim City on the borders of Egypt. He has vast lands. Certainly Malik al-Ashtar will pass through the city and stop in it to rest.

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan said: Let's send a man to tell him to kill Malik al-Ashtar and we won't tax him for life. Thus Muawiyah's delegate quickly set out for Egypt taking the poisoned honey to persuade the man to kill Malik al-Ashtar.

The man agreed to Muawiyah's plan. He took the poisoned honey. He was looking forward to Malik al-Ashtar's arrival. After only a few days, Malik al-Ashtar arrived in al-Qilzim City (Qulzom). The man invited the new ruler of Egypt for lunch in his house. Malik al-Ashtar accepted the invitation thankfully.

The man put the cup of the poisoned honey on the table. The guest took one spoon of the poisoned honey. He felt a severe pain in his stomach. He realized the plot. So, he put his hand on his belly and said: In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. We belong to Allah, and we'll come back to Him!

Malik Ashtar's TombMalik al-Ashtar received death with the bravery of the certain believer, who knew that his way was Islam and the Paradise.

When Malik al-Ashtar became a martyr, Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan was about to fly because of happiness. So, he said: Ali bin Abu Talib had two hands. I cut off one of them on the day of Siffin. It was Ammar bin Yasir. And today I have cut off the other hand. It is Malik al-Ashtar.

But the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) was very sad. So, he expressed his sorrow: May Allah have mercy on Malik! He loved and obeyed me as I loved and obeyed Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Thus, Malik al-Ashtar ended his life in Jihad (struggle). His bright behavior will remain as a model for the Muslim young men everywhere!

The Tomb Of Malik Ashar

When the Commander of the Faithful, Ali bin Abu Talib (as) learned about the martyrdom of Malik Ashtar, he exclaimed: "Malik, what a man Malik was! By Allah, if he had been a mountain he would have been a big one, and if he had been a stone he would have been tough; no horseman could have reached it and no bird could fly over it. *(Nahjul Balagha, Saying no. 441*