

## A Salute to the Master of Martyrs

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ.

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O Abū ‘Abd Allāh!<sup>3</sup>

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singular pronoun *ka* since I am now specifying my address to him alone, not to him and the angels surrounding him. Similarly, if I were to address a woman, two people, etc., with the evocative, I would have to adjust the pronoun accordingly. It is for this reason that all of the salutations at the beginning of this *ziyārah* use the singular *al-Salāmu ‘alayka*.

- *Salāman*. This form is never used with the prepositional phrase *alaykum*.
- *Salāmun* or simply *salām*. This form is also never used with the prepositional phrase *alaykum*, and it conveys a sense of permanence and longevity not conveyed by the previous forms. Both the third and the fourth forms are mentioned in the following verse, which narrates the greetings exchanged between the angels and Abraham: “They said, ‘*Salāman*.’ He replied, ‘*Salāmun*’” (Qur’ān 11:69).

3. “Abū ‘Abd Allāh” is a filial appellation (*kunyah*) for Imam al-Ḥusayn. In Arab culture, three kinds of proper names were used to refer to a person:

- a given name (*ism*) such as *al-Ḥusayn*
- an appellation (*kunyah*), which always comprises one of the following words: *abū* (father of), *umm* (mother of), *ibn* (son of), or *bint* (daughter of), followed by the proper name of one’s child or parent, respectively. An appellation literally shows one’s kinship to another—whether paternal, maternal, or filial—but it usually connotes respect or endearment since Arabs considered calling someone by his appellation more polite and

more endearing than calling him by his given name.

- an epithet (*laqab*), which may either be honorific, such as *al-Shahīd* (The Martyr), or disparaging, such as *al-Kadhdhāb* (The Mendicant). Incidentally, there are some epithets that resemble appellations, such as *Abū Turāb* for Imam ‘Alī, and *Abū Lahab* for the Prophet’s uncle ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā. However, these epithets are distinguished from appellations because their second component is not the proper name of the person’s child or parent.

Interestingly, in Arab culture, they did not always wait for a person to have a child before applying a particular appellation to that person. Rather, in many cases, if not all cases, they would give a person an appellation along with his or her given name. They considered this a sort of good omen, as though to say, “May you live long enough to have a child named such-and-such.” Additionally, certain appellations became standard for certain given names, usually to honor the original namesake. For instance, if a boy was named *Ishāq*, then his appellation would usually be *Abū Ya‘qūb* to honor the prophet, Isaac, father of Jacob. If a boy was named ‘Alī, then his appellation would usually be *Abū al-Ḥasan* to honor the first imam, ‘Alī, father of Imam al-Ḥasan. And if a boy was named Ḥasan, then his appellation would usually be *Abū Muḥammad* to honor the second imam.

Some traditions indicate that Imam al-Ḥusayn was given his appellation by his grandfather, Prophet Muḥammad, on the seventh day after his birth and not after he had a son named ‘Abd Allāh. It is reported from Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn that *Asmā’ bint ‘Umays* told him the following:

I was the midwife for your grandmother, *Fāṭimah*, the daughter of the Messenger of God, for the births of al-

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Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. When she gave birth to al-Ḥasan, the Prophet came and told me, “O Asmā! Bring me my child.” I brought him to him swaddled in a piece of yellow fabric. He discarded the fabric and said, “Did I not advise you not to swaddle newborns in yellow fabric?” He requested that I bring him white fabric, and he swaddled him in it. Then he recited the *adhān* in the child’s right ear and the *iqāmah* in his left. He then asked ‘Alī, “What have you named this son of mine?”

Imam ‘Alī replied, “I dared not name him before you had, O Messenger of God.”

The Prophet said, “And I dare not name him before the Lord Almighty does.”

At that, Gabriel descended and said, “God conveys his *salām* and says, ‘O Muḥammad! ‘Alī is to you as Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after you. Therefore, name your son after the son of Aaron.’”

The Prophet asked, “And what was the name of Aaron’s son?”

Gabriel replied, “Shabbar.”

The Prophet asked, “What does Shabbar mean in Arabic?”

Gabriel replied, “al-Ḥasan.” So the Prophet named him al-Ḥasan.

And when Fāṭimah gave birth to al-Ḥusayn, I delivered him. Again, the Prophet came and told me, “O Asmā! Bring me my child.” I handed him to him swaddled, this time in a

piece of white fabric, and he did to him as he had done to al-Ḥasan. Then the Prophet wept and said to the newborn, “A great tragedy shall befall you. O God! Damn his murderer!” Then he told me, “Do not tell Fāṭimah about this [just yet].” On the seventh day of his birth, the Prophet came again and said, “Bring me my son.” I brought him, and he did to him as he had done to al-Ḥasan. Then he slaughtered a salt-and-pepper-colored ram for him, just as he had done for al-Ḥasan. He gave me, as the midwife, a shoulder and leg. He shaved the baby’s head and gave in charity the weight of his hair in silver. Then he anointed his head with scented oil and said, “[Anointing a child’s head with] blood [from the sacrifice] is a ritual from the Age of Ignorance, [thus I replace that ritual with this].” Then he sat and took the baby in his lap and said, “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh! It pains me...” And he wept.

I asked him, “You weep now, and you wept on the first day. What is the matter?”

He replied, “I weep for this son of mine. A rebellious and faithless host from the heirs of Umayyah will kill him. May God damn them! And may he deprive them of my intercession on the Day of Judgment! A man [from among them] who seeks to pervert Islam and has no faith in God Almighty will kill him.” Then he raised his hands in prayer and said, “O God! I ask you with respect to my two sons what Abraham asked you with respect to his progeny. O God! Love them, and love whoever loves them. Damn whoever hates them with enough damnation to fill the skies and earth” (*Amālī al-Ṭūsī* 1.13.32).

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The renowned commentator of *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* Mīrzā Abū al-Faḍl al-Ṭīhrānī has offered two alternate explanations for Imam al-Ḥusayn’s appellation, *Abū ‘Abd Allāh*.

- *Abū ‘Abd Allāh* essentially means *‘abd allāh* or “servant of God.” Occasionally, Arabs would employ the form of an appellation to communicate an attribute through a kind of hyperbole. For instance, they might call a generous person *abū al-jawād*, literally “the father of the generous,” when they really mean he is *jawād* or “generous.” Similarly, they call vinegar *abū nāfi‘*, literally “the father of the beneficial,” when they really mean it is *nāfi‘* or “beneficial.” Similarly, they call a rooster *abū al-yaqzān*, literally “the father of the wakeful,” when they really mean it is *yaqzān* or “wakeful.” In this vein, in one tradition, Prophet Muḥammad says that his appellation, *Abū al-Qāsim*, not only indicates that he had a son named *Qāsim*, but also that he is the *qāsim* or “divider” between those who go to heaven and those who go to hell. He told a delegation of Jews, “On the Day of Judgment, God will determine who goes to hell. Whoever rejects me, from the first to the last of humanity, will go to hell. And God will determine who goes to paradise. Whoever believes in me and accepts my prophethood will go to paradise” (*‘Ilal al-sharā’i’* 1.106.1). Thus, the Prophet named Imam al-Ḥusayn *Abū ‘Abd Allāh* because he knew, through divine inspiration, that his grandson would reach the epitome of servitude to God through his sacrifice and martyrdom for his sake.
- *Abū ‘Abd Allāh* essentially means *abū ‘ibād allāh* or “father of the servants of God.” One tradition says that we each have three fathers: one that bore us, one that married us, and one that taught us. Insofar as Imam al-Ḥusayn has taught us through his

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ.

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Peace be with you, O son of the Messenger of God!<sup>4</sup>

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words and deeds, he is our teacher and, therefore, our spiritual father (al-Ṭihrānī, Abū al-Faḍl. *Shifā’ al-ṣudūr*. Qum: Intishārāt-e Dār al-Uswah. p. 98–99).

While these explanations are clever and creative, they really have no basis and are, therefore, unjustifiable.

4. In Arabic, words such as *ibn* (son), *bint* (daughter), *walad* (child), and *dhurriyyah* (progeny) refer to one’s immediate son and daughter as well as one’s more distant male and female progeny such as grandchildren and great-grandchildren. More significantly, in the Qur’ān and traditions these words are used equally to refer to all of one’s progeny, whether through one’s son or one’s daughter. In other words, one’s daughter’s son is as much one’s progeny as one’s son’s son.

There are at least two examples of this usage in the Qur’ān.

- Verses 6:84–85 name Jesus as one of the progeny (*dhurriyyah*) of either Noah or Abraham (the pronoun is ambiguous and could refer to either) when his relation to both was clearly through only his mother since he was fatherless.
- Verse 3:61 calls Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Ḥusayn sons (*abnā’*) of Prophet Muḥammad when they were directly related to him only through their mother, Fāṭimah.

This Islamic usage stands in stark contrast to the usage of these words during the Age of Ignorance, before the advent of Islam. Arabs of that era would only consider their sons’ sons to be their progeny, not their daughters’ sons. The famous couplet says:

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بُنُونَا بَنُو أَبْنَائِنَا وَبَنَاتِنَا

بُنُوهُنَّ أَبْنَاءُ الرِّجَالِ الأَبَاعِدِ

Our sons are our sons' sons;

Our daughters'/sons are the sons of other men

Hypocrites who held personal vendettas against the Prophet's family reverted to the former usage of words such as *ibn* and *bint*, rejecting the Islamic usage, at least with regard to the Prophet's progeny. What follows are three illustrative examples:

- Dhakwān, Mu'āwiyah's servant, reported that Mu'āwiyah once threatened, "If I learn of anyone referring to these two men (i.e., al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) as the 'Sons of the Messenger of God,' I shall punish him severely. Instead, refer to them as the 'Sons of 'Alī.'" Dhakwān said, "After he issued this edict, he ordered me to enter his own children's names in *al-Sharaf* (this seems to have been a ledger containing the names of nobles). So I entered the names of his sons and his sons' sons, but I left out his daughters' sons. I brought the ledger to him. He looked through it and scolded me saying, 'Fie on you! You have left out some of my progeny.' I asked him, 'Whom?' He said, 'Are the sons of so-and-so (he mentioned one of his daughters) not my sons? Are the sons of so-and-so (he mentioned another of his daughters) not my sons?' I told him, 'Really, are your daughters' sons to be your sons, but Fāṭimah's sons are not to be the sons of the Messenger of God?' He told me, 'What is wrong with you? Do not let a soul hear you say this!'" (*Biḥār al-anwār* 33.1.20.531).
- 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ wrote to Imam 'Alī, criticizing him for, among other things, calling al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn sons of Prophet Muḥammad. In response, Imam 'Alī told 'Amr's messenger, "Tell

this prophet-hating son of a prophet-hating father (*al-shāni’ ibn al-shāni’i*), ‘If they are not the Prophet’s sons, then he has no progeny and is *abtar*, as your father once falsely surmised” (*Sharḥ nahj al-balāghah* vol. 20 p. 334). In this response, Imam ‘Alī refers to *Sūrat al-Kawthar* (chapter 108), which was God’s response to ‘Amr’s father, al-‘Āṣ ibn Wā’il, who had called the Prophet *abtar* (literally, one who is “cut off” because he has no progeny) because his sons had all died and he had only daughters. God calls al-‘Āṣ a *shāni’* or “prophet-hater” and reflects his taunt back on him saying, “It is the one who hates you who is cut off, not you” (Qur’ān 108:3). By alluding to this verse, Imam ‘Alī accomplishes two purposes: 1) He reminds ‘Amr of God’s condemnation of his father al-‘Āṣ. 2) He shows that, by perpetuating his father’s attitude toward the Prophet’s progeny, ‘Amr continues his family’s legacy of standing in opposition to the Qur’ān. Let us rephrase Imam ‘Alī’s argument: The Qur’ān says that the Prophet was not *abtar*, meaning he did, in fact, have progeny. We know that he had no progeny except through Fāṭimah. Therefore, Fāṭimah’s progeny are the Prophet’s progeny, and to deny that al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are the Prophet’s progeny is to contravene the Qur’ān and to follow in the footsteps of your father who was condemned by the Qur’ān.

- In another tradition, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf sent for Yaḥyā ibn Ya‘mur, one of the scholars of Iraq. He asked him, “Are you one of those who think that the two sons of ‘Alī (i.e., al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) are the Prophet’s sons?”

Yaḥyā said, “Yes, I am. And I can cite verses from the Qur’ān to support my opinion.”



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السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا ابْنَ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

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Peace be with you, O son of the Commander of the Faithful<sup>5</sup>

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Al-Ḥajjāj said, “Go ahead.”

Yaḥyā said, “First, give me amnesty.”

Al-Ḥajjāj said, “You have amnesty.”

Yaḥyā began, “Has God not said, ‘We bestowed upon him (i.e., Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and we guided each. And we had guided Noah before [him]. And from his progeny (i.e., Abraham’s or Noah’s progeny, although Yaḥyā assumes the antecedent is Abraham) were David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. Thus do we reward the righteous.’ Then the Almighty said, ‘And [also from his progeny were] Zechariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus’ (Qur’ān 6:84–85). Did Jesus have a father?”

Al-Ḥajjāj replied in the negative.

Yaḥyā concluded, “[Thus, his relation to Abraham through his mother alone must have been enough to include him in the progeny of Abraham] since God, in his Book, traced his lineage back to Abraham.”

Al-Ḥajjāj asked him, “What has compelled you to speak thus?”

Yaḥyā replied, “The covenant God has made with scholars that they not hide what they know” (*Bihār al-anwār* 93.2.29.7).

5. The title *Amīr al-mu’minīn* or “Commander of the Faithful” was an exclusive title of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. It is transmitted that the Prophet said, “Nobody is ‘Commander of the Faithful’ except for this brother of mine, and the command of the faithful is not permitted after me for anyone except him” (*Bihār al-anwār* 37.2.52 p.209). In fact, there is indication that this title is not even permitted for the rest of the