

2.8 Imām ‘Alī as-Sajjād ؑ: Reforming Hearts

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Describe the atmosphere in Medina when Imām as-Sajjād ؑ returned after the martyrdom (*shahādah*) of his father, Imām Ḥusayn ؑ.
- Analyze the sociopolitical purposes behind Imām as-Sajjād’s supplications (*du‘ās*).
- Outline ways in which the Imām ؑ remained steadfast and patient despite the multiple unjust rulers of his time.
- Describe the legacy of Imām as-Sajjād ؑ.

RETURN TO MEDINA UNTIL HIS OWN MARTYRDOM: 2nd Rabī‘ al-Awwal 62 AH to 25th Muḥarram 95 AH

When Imām as-Sajjād ؑ and the caravan approached Medina, he set up a tent for the women. Then, the Imām ؑ turned to a man named Bashīr ibn Hadhlam, whose father was a famous poet, and asked him to enter Medina and announce the death of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ ahead of the caravan. Bashīr went near the Masjid an-Nabī where he loudly cried out:

*O people of Medina! May you never stay therein!
Ḥusayn was killed, so let the tears now rain,
His body is in Karbalā’, all blood-stained!
While his head is on a spear, for all displayed.*

Hearing this, the people began to cry out loudly and gathered around Bashīr, asking him for more information. He announced: “Here is ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn, accompanied by his aunts and sisters; they have all returned to you. I am his messenger to inform you about where he is.”¹

The people went out to welcome the Imām ؑ and his caravan, all the while crying and wailing, offering their condolences.

IMĀM AS-SAJJĀD’S STRUGGLES IN MEDINA

Even though our Imāms ؑ were present, there were always those who sought to keep power for themselves and away from the Imāms ؑ, because they knew that they would not get special privileges if the Imāms ؑ lead the people with justice. Although people commonly think that Imām as-Sajjād’s problems ended when he returned to Medina, the city of his grandfather, the era of oppression continued until his own martyrdom.

There were many people in the city who abandoned the Imām ؑ out of fear of being associated with him, and out of a desire to be closer to the governing leadership. Even some of the people who used to love the Imām ؑ before he went to Karbalā’ were now hiding their love for him. During this time, the Imām ؑ said: “In Mecca and Medina, there are not even 20 people who love us, the Ahlul Bayt.”²

According to some scholars and historical narrations, for some years after returning to Medina, Imām as-Sajjād ؑ used to live in a black tent in the desert outside of the city. He did this because he did not want to be in contact with the people who had been disloyal to him. From the desert, the Imām ؑ would secretly go to perform the visitation (*ziyārah*) of his father and grandfather in Iraq. Imām as-Sajjād ؑ was not even allowed in the Prophet’s Masjid and would sit outside by the shoes.

¹ Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Al-Luhūf*, P. 115.

² Ibn Abil Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, Vol. 4, P. 104.

IMĀM AS-SAJJĀD'S SUPPLICATIONS (DU'ĀS)

One of the primary methods that Imām as-Sajjād ؑ used to bring people to the path of true Islam was to spread the pure teachings in the form of supplications (*du'ās*), whispered prayers, and advice.

For example, in a manner that would not be seen as political, he would talk about the concept of Imamate (*Imāmah*). He introduced *Imāmah* as a fundamental Islamic belief that all Muslims will be questioned about in their graves.

This made people think: *Who really are the Imāms ؑ in our time? Can the Banū Umayyah be the true and Divinely-appointed Imāms?!* Similarly the famous compilation of his supplications and whispered prayers in the book entitled, *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah*, is full of Islamic teachings with regards to beliefs, culture, society, politics, as well as practical rulings—all passed on through the unique method of supplications. This book is one of the greatest treasures that we have today.

There are supplications for all different topics and issues, such as the rights of parents, children, and neighbors; for when you are in a difficult situation, have a worrisome task, engulfed in sorrows, or sickness. These *du'ās* can help us in every situation in our lives, and shape our hearts as well. It was through these *du'ās* that Imām as-Sajjād ؑ would preach to and teach the people. His supplications were full of important messages about ethics and morals (*akhlāq*), courage, knowledge, Monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), and so much more.



STOP AND REFLECT: How can prayers and supplications change and refine the state of people's hearts?

The governor at the time could not stop him because he was reciting supplications, but through these powerful *du'ās*, he was able to spread the teachings of Islam and slowly shape the hearts of the people. This was how he laid the foundations that allowed the people to start understanding Islam better, and become students of the Imāms ؑ after him, like Imām al-Bāqir ؑ and Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq ؑ.

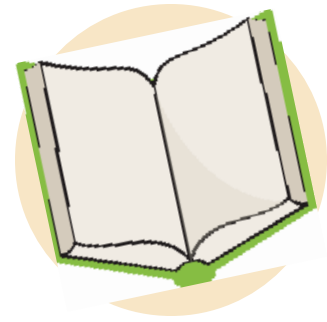
SPREADING AWARENESS OF 'ĀSHŪRĀ'

The Imām ؑ would also do everything in his power to educate the people about the events of Karbalā'. He knew that the key to keeping Islam alive was to remind others about the sacrifice of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ and the oppression that he and his family underwent. For example, whenever he would pass through the meat market and saw a butcher ready to slaughter an animal, he would ask them: "What are you doing?"

The butcher would reply: "I am about to slaughter this animal."

The Imām ؑ would tell them: "Make sure you give it some water! My father was slaughtered without any water!"³

Hearing this, people would become intrigued and want to know more about what had transpired.





STOP AND REFLECT: Why is reminding people about Karbalā' the key to keeping Islam alive?

The caliphate at that time had made it forbidden (*ḥarām*) to mourn and commemorate the sacrifice of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ, so the 4th Imām ؑ would hold secret gatherings (*majālis*) during the time of Ḥajj—underground and in abandoned locations. After seven years, due to the political disputes that were happening, the caliphs shifted their focus away from him.

After Imām as-Sajjād ؑ returned to Medina and word spread about the events of Karbalā', many people were outraged at Yazīd's blatant oppression. Rebellions began springing up all over the Muslim world, as people attempted to oust Yazīd out of power.

REBELLION IN MEDINA

When the news about Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom (*shahādah*) reached the people of Medina, they were infuriated. As a result, the governor of Medina decided to send some nobles to Shām to meet with Yazīd. He was hoping that Yazīd would bribe them to calm them down. However, when they saw Yazīd up close—his drinking, gambling, and other bad habits—they returned to Medina even more upset. They began telling

everyone about Yazīd's un-Islamic behavior, and that he was completely unfit to be the leader of the Muslims. Soon after, a rebellion broke out, and the Umayyads—the followers of Yazīd—were kicked out of Medina.

When Yazīd heard about this, he sent an army to Medina to squash the rebellion. This happened almost three years after the tragedy of Karbalā'. His army surrounded the city, giving the people no choice except to surrender. After this, Yazīd's army entered the city and wreaked havoc, slaughtering and harming thousands of innocent and pious people. This horrible incident came to be known as the 'Tragedy of Ḥarrah.'

During this tragedy, Yazīd had given clear instructions to his commander not to harm Imām as-Sajjād ؑ or his family. Thus, the Imām's home actually became a safe haven, and many people were given shelter there. According to narrations, he housed more than 400 people during this time, many of whom had previously mistreated his family, such as Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam.



STOP AND REFLECT: Which good traits of morals and etiquettes (*akhlāq*) is the Imām ؑ demonstrating by giving shelter to those who hurt his family before? Can this action of the Imām ؑ be counted as a form of charity?

THE TAWWĀBĪN

(Those who were Penitents/Repenters)

Another notable rebellion that occurred as a result of the tragedy of Karbalā' was that of the Tawwābīn. They were the same individuals who gave their allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Muslim ibn 'Aqīl when he first came to Kūfah, but then they turned their backs on him. Immediately after the day of 'Āshūrā', they regretted their actions and wanted to atone for their mistake, hence their title: "The Tawwābīn" which means "those who repent." The Tawwābīn were led by a man named Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad al-Khuzā'i, and they rose up in the year 65 AH seeking revenge for Imām Ḥusayn (عليه السلام), but they were quickly suppressed and killed.

MUKHTĀR ATH-THAQAFĪ

Perhaps the most famous uprising was that of Mukhtār ibn Abī 'Ubayd ath-Thaqafī. Mukhtār was imprisoned before the battle of Karbalā', and therefore on the day of 'Āshūrā' he was not able to be with Imām Ḥusayn (عليه السلام). When he was released from prison, he began a mission to seek revenge for what had transpired on the plains of Karbalā'. Although it is not fully clear whether Imām as-Sajjād (عليه السلام) supported Mukhtār's movement or not, it has been established that he did not oppose it. He is recorded to have said: "May Allah reward Mukhtār with goodness,"⁴ when Mukhtār killed 'Ubaydullāh ibn Ziyād and 'Umar ibn Sa'd.

Mukhtār's uprising began in 66 AH, and his army managed to kill many of the enemies, such as Ḥarmalah, Shimr, and 'Umar ibn Sa'd. They also overthrew and killed Ibn Ziyād, the governor of Kūfah, and Mukhtār then took over and became the governor there. He only ruled for a little over a year, after which he was overthrown and killed by the army of Muṣ'ab ibn Zubayr.

THE STATE OF THE CALIPHATE (KHILĀFAH)

Yazīd was only the caliph (*khalifah*) for about three years. He died in the year 64 AH, after which his son, Mu'āwiyah ibn Yazīd, was appointed to the position. This man though was a pious person. He saw the oppressions that his father had caused to the family of the Ahlul Bayt (عليه السلام), so after 40 days he abdicated (relinquished) the caliphate and disapproved of his father and grandfather's opposition of Imām 'Alī (عليه السلام) and his children.

Now, the Umayyads were unsure about who the new caliph should be. Eventually, the caliphate fell into the hands of Marwān ibn Ḥakam. Marwān had previously been the governor of Medina, and he was the one who tried to force Walīd to get the allegiance (*bay'ah*) from Imām Ḥusayn (عليه السلام). Marwān was the ruler for 9 months, until he was assassinated in 65 AH. Then, his son, 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwān, became the caliph.

THE KHILĀFAH OF 'ABD AL-MALIK IBN MARWĀN

One of the darkest periods in the history of Islam was during the rulership of 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwān, which coincided with 21 years of Imām as-Sajjād's (عليه السلام) *Imāmah*. Prior to becoming the caliph, 'Abdul Malik was known to be a pious person in Medina because he would spend a lot of time worshipping.

According to several narrations, he was reciting the Qur'ān when he received the news about his father's death. Upon hearing this, he promptly closed the Qur'ān and said to this noble Book: "This is where you and I part ways!"



STOP AND REFLECT: How can a change in circumstances change the relationship that people have with Allah (ﷻ)?

His actions demonstrate how he truly did separate himself from the Qur'ān. He was a vicious oppressor whose heart became hard due to his horrible actions. He himself admitted: "I have changed so much to the point that if I do good actions, I do not become happy; and if I commit evil actions, I do not become upset."⁵

⁴ 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol. 45, P. 385.

⁵ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī at-Tārikh*, Vol. 4, P. 521.

THE KHILĀFAH OF WALĪD IBN ‘ABDUL MALIK

After the death of ‘Abdul Malik, his son Walīd became the next caliph. He felt that as long as Imām as-Sajjād ؑ was alive, his rulership was not safe because the people loved the Imām ؑ too much. Therefore, he decided to assassinate the Imām ؑ by ordering the governor of Medina to poison him.

After drinking the poison, Imām as-Sajjād ؑ suffered severe pain and was bedridden for a few days. During this time, he kept praying to Allah ﷻ, and whenever people came to visit him, he would praise Allah ﷻ and thank Him for granting him martyrdom.

Imām as-Sajjād ؑ finally left this world on the 25th of Muḥarram, in the year 95 AH. Prior to his martyrdom, he made it clear to the people that his son, Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir ؑ, would be the Imām after him.⁶

THE LEGACY OF IMĀM AS-SAJJĀD ؑ

Imām as-Sajjād ؑ left behind many beautiful supplications (*du‘ās*) and lessons for us in:

- *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah*
(Collection of Supplications of Imām as-Sajjād)
- *Risālat al-Ḥuqūq*
(Treaties of Rights)
- *Al-Munājāt al-Khamsah ‘Asharah*
(The 15 Whispered Prayers).



After the death of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ, the circumstances remained very difficult for Imām as-Sajjād ؑ. We can use the lessons of his steadfastness and patience to think about different responsibilities that we have to fulfill in our lives.

We know for a fact that he made the best decision in every situation because the Imāms ؑ are *nūrun wāḥid*—meaning that they are all from the same light, and each one of them is immaculate. In our lives, we must always try our best to be tactful about the decisions that we have to make in order to ensure that they align with the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt ؑ.

⁶ Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Al-Amālī*, Vol. 1, P. 435.

Activity 2.8a: A Timeline of Imāmah

In the timeline below, add in the events that happened [during the life-time of Imām as-Sajjād ؑ] in the highlighted year.

Highlighted Year	Event
38 AH	
50 AH	
61 AH	
63 AH	
64 AH	
65 AH	
86 AH	
95 AH	

Activity 2.8b: Analyze a Supplication (Du‘ā’) from *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah*

Sayyid Husayn M. Ja‘farī, a translator of *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah*, answers the question: “Why does Imām as-Sajjād ؑ pray for forgiveness of sins when he is inerrant (free from committing any sins)?”

He writes that:

The original Arabic words استغفار and توبة (istighfār and tawbah) can be translated as ‘seeking forgiveness’ and ‘repentance,’ but they convey meanings far broader than the English terms, both of which are connected with a sentimental and moralistic sense of guilt.

When the Prophet ﷺ or Imām Zaynul ‘Ābidīn ؑ ask Allah ﷻ for forgiveness, they are perfectly sincere in this request, but it does not imply that they have any sins, rather they are asking forgiveness for not being able to truly thank Allah ﷻ how He deserves.⁷

With the lens above, examine the Whispered Prayer (*Munājāt*) #1 toward the end of *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah* which is referred to as the ‘Whispered Prayer of the Repenters’ (*Munājāt at-Tā‘ibīn*). Read through the entire prayer, and then answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think Imām Zaynul ‘Ābidīn ؑ prays for forgiveness in so many of his supplications and prayers (*du‘ās* and *munājāt*)?

2. What can we learn from this whispered prayer?

⁷ Translator’s Foreword: <https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/translators-introduction>

3. Annotate this *munājāt* based on your reflections when you read each line or section. Do not share your reflections with others. For example, you may reflect on some of the sins in your life that you are reminded of.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

4. When you reach the end of this whispered prayer which details Allah's forgiving attributes, reflect on how each attribute is connected with forgiveness and repentance. Write your reflections here.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Activity 4.3a: Scenarios

DIRECTIONS: Read the following scenarios, then write down why the decision might be difficult for the person to uphold, and what they should do in that situation. Then, discuss it with the class.

1. Mujtaba and his friend, Zayn, go bike riding. Zayn breaks his bike, and tells Mujtaba not to tell their other friends until it is fixed. The next day, Mujtaba and his other friends go out bike riding, and they ask why Zayn did not join them. What should Mujtaba say?

2. Asiyah's uncle asks her if she can help him by babysitting his daughter. Asiyah is about to leave her friend's house to go to her uncle's house, but her friends tell her to stay longer. What should Asiyah do?

3. Sarah is supposed to check on her friend's plants while she is away, but she gets busy with other things and remembers very late to check on them. What should she do?

4. Husayn tells his mom that if he is allowed to stay home and not go shopping with her, then he will do his chores. However, as soon as she leaves, he realizes that his favorite show is coming on TV. What should Husayn do?

Activity 4.3b: Skits

DIRECTIONS: Create a skit where a person has to decide whether to break another person's trust or promise, or do the right thing using the examples above, or your own examples. After your skit, explain why the decision was difficult for the person in the skit, and how they overcame it.

Similarly, entertainment can fulfill the purpose of us getting closer to Allah ﷻ if the following conditions are met: **(i)** We have the right intention of it being a means toward a greater end; **(ii)** Whatever we are doing or watching in terms of entertainment is permissible (*ḥalāl*), and does not prevent us from performing our obligations and responsibilities; and **(iii)** It is done in moderation (not in extreme).

Imām al-Kāẓim ؑ said: “The time spent in pursuing legitimate (*ḥalāl*) pleasures helps someone with the other aspects of life (including worship).”³

Useful entertainment can help us rest and rejuvenate to perform more worship, or fulfill our other responsibilities. It can help us get closer to other believers, for example, when we spend time with our family or friends. Taking a break can also be a way of relaxing our mind and body after a long day of work.



STOP AND REFLECT: What useful types of entertainment do you partake in? How does it help you?

TYPES OF ENTERTAINMENT

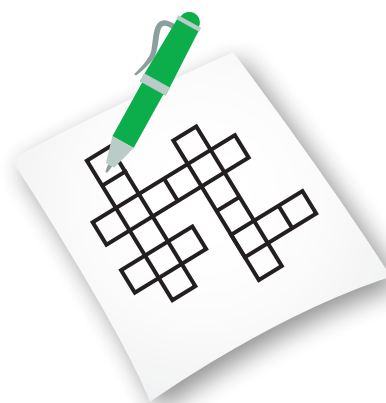
Entertainment comes in different forms, and people have their own tastes and preferences. One way of breaking down entertainment is into various categories of mental, physical, social, and media.

MENTAL ENTERTAINMENT

One form of entertainment is mental entertainment, or fun activities that use our mind such as puzzles, crosswords, trivia competitions, and so on. Some types of reading can also get us to think and reflect in a positive way. Mental entertainment can help strengthen our intellect, which can become very useful in all areas of life. Sometimes however, mental challenges involve learning useless trivia. At other times, mental entertainment can involve engaging in something forbidden, such as games which involve gambling or betting, so we must be careful not to partake in such kinds of things.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Islam places great importance on physical activities and remaining fit. In fact, one of the principles for strengthening our faith (*īmān*) is to exercise and remain healthy. We have many examples of the Prophet ﷺ and his Ahlul Bayt ؑ participating in different sports and physical activities. However, there are certain physical activities that may not be allowed for us if they could be harmful to our body or health. As well, some sports (such as contact sports that involve touching) should not be done with anyone with whom such physical contact is not permitted. If you have gym class in school in which they engage in dancing, inappropriate gender mixing, or other forbidden activities, then you can get a note to excuse you out of these things.



3 *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 75, P. 321.

MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy in the context of what we are learning is using a set of tools to think critically about the information that is presented to us. You may have learned some of these things in school, such as when you were looking for reliable sources for a project you were researching. In an Islamic context, we want to make sure that we are seeking information correctly. Not all information that we find will be relevant or useful for us. There are some things we are better off not knowing! As well, how we go about seeking knowledge is also very important, as is what we do with it.

BE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHAT NEWS WE WATCH

When it comes to watching the news, we should think about who is presenting the information to us, and why they are saying the things that they are. An example that is quite obvious is Fox News. Many people know them to have a strong bias toward their own viewpoints or opinions of the world, but sometimes the problems can be less obvious. Occasionally, we might notice that a news station agrees with some things we believe in, but that does not mean they will always be right.



THINK, PAIR, SHARE

1. What are some examples of news shows or stations that say some good things, but also relay certain items which we as Muslims disagree with?
2. What is the reason why news organizations present information?

Some shows that we watch might have various opinions we agree with, but then mix them with certain things which we cannot concur with. For example, they might say that women not being allowed to have an education is a bad thing, but they may also refer to women who wear ḥijāb as being oppressed. They might also side with certain Muslim countries because it benefits them, while turning a blind eye to the injustices that are carried out in those countries. They might also paint other countries in an extremely negative light without ever highlighting their accomplishments. In pretty much every case, they are just looking to get high ratings and appeal to people.

When you are watching the news, you should avoid information overload. If you watch a news channel for a while or read many articles, you might notice the same stories or perspectives being repeated. We should avoid occupying our minds with unnecessary information that can prevent us from thinking clearly. News stations invest large amounts of money in trying to see what will get more people to watch their broadcasts. They are also funded by people who want to promote their own views of the world.

It is good to stay informed about what is happening in the world, but it is more important to be confident in your values, and what you know about the world before you listen to the news. For example, if we watch news about Palestine, we should be thinking about the bigger picture and what the real story must be. Over time, you will notice that the stories about Palestine from some news channels or websites always tend to present Palestinians in a negative light.



5. Author of Article 2: _____

Google the author. What did you find out about them?

6. Summarize what the article says about the topic.

7. Compare and contrast the two articles. What are the similarities and differences between what they are saying about the topic?

8. List the resources you used below.
