

Personalities >> Syedna Khuwaja Hasan Basri

Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri was born at Madina al-Munawwarah in 21 (642), the son of a slave captured in Maisan who afterward became a client of the Prophet Mohammad's Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him secretary Zaid ibn Thabit. Brought up in Basra, he met many Companions of the Prophet including, it is said, seventy of those who fought at the Battle of Badr. He grew up to become one of the most prominent figures of his generation, being famous for his uncompromising piety and outspoken condemnation of worldliness in high places. Whilst the Mo'tazelite theologians claim him as the founder of their movement (and 'Amr ibn 'Obaid and Wasel ibn 'Ata' are counted amongst his pupils), in Sufi hagiography he is revered as one of the greatest saints of early Islam. He died at Basra in 110 (728). Many of his speeches —he was a brilliant orator— and sayings are quoted by Arab authors and not a few of his letters have been preserved.

The conversion of Hasan of Basra

The beginning of Hasan of Basra's conversion was as follows. He was a jewel merchant and was called Hasan of the Pearls. He traded with Byzantium, and had to do with the generals and ministers of Caesar. On one occasion, going to Byzantium he called on the prime minister and conversed with him a while.

"We will go to a certain place," the minister told him, "if you are agreeable."

"It is for you to say," Hasan replied. "I agree."

So the minister commanded a horse to be brought for Sayyiduna Hasan al-Basri. He mounted with the minister, and they set out. When they reached the desert Hasan perceived a tent of Byzantine brocade, fastened with ropes of silk and golden pegs, set firm in the ground. He stood to one side. Then a mighty army, all accoutered in the panoply of war, came out; they circled the tent, said a few words, and departed. Philosophers and scholars to the number of nigh four hundred arrived on the scene; they circled the tent, said a few words, and departed. After that three hundred illumined elders with white beards approached the tent, circled it, said a few words, and departed. Thereafter more than two hundred moon-fair maidens, each bearing a plate of gold and silver and precious stones, circled the tent, said a few words, and departed.

Sayyiduna Hasan relates that, astonished and filled with wonder, he asked himself what this might be.

“When we alighted,” he went on, “I asked the minister. He said that the Caesar had a son of unsurpassable beauty, perfect in all the branches of learning and unrivaled in the arena of manly prowess. His father loved him with all his heart.”

Suddenly he fell ill so Hasan related on the authority of the minister. All the skilled physicians proved powerless to cure him. Finally he died, and was buried in that tent. Once every year people come out to visit him. First an immense army circles the tent, and they say: “O prince, if this circumstance that has befallen thee had come about in war, we would have all sacrificed our lives for thee, to ransom thee back. But the circumstance that has befallen thee is at the hand of one against whom we cannot fight, whom we cannot challenge.” This they say, and then return.

The philosophers and the scholars come forward, and say: “This circumstance has been brought about by one against whom we cannot do anything by means of learning and philosophy, science and sophistry. For all the philosophers of the world are powerless before him, and all the learned are ignorant beside his knowledge. Otherwise we would have contrived devices and spoken words which all in creation could not have withstood.” This they say, and then return.

Next the venerable elders advance, and say: “O prince, if this circumstance that has befallen thee could have been set right by the intercession of elders, we would all have interceded with humble petitions, and would not have abandoned thee there. But this circumstance has been brought upon thee by one against whom no mortal man’s intercession profits anything.” This they say, and depart.

Now the moon-fair maidens with their plates of gold and precious stones advance, circle the tent, and say: “Son of Caesar, if this circumstance that has befallen thee could have been set right by wealth and beauty, we would have sacrificed ourselves and given great moneys, and would not have abandoned thee. But this circumstance has been brought upon thee by one on whom wealth and beauty have no effect.” This they say, and return.

Then Caesar himself with his chief minister enters the tent, and says: “O eye and lamp of thy father, O fruit of the heart of thy father, O dearest beloved of thy father, what is in thy father’s hand to perform? Thy father brought a mighty army, he brought philosophers and scholars, intercessors and advisers, beautiful maid-ens, wealth and all manner of luxuries; and he came himself. If all this could have been of avail, thy father would have done all that lay in his power. But this circumstance has been brought about by one before whom thy father, with all this apparatus, this army and retinue,

this luxury and wealth and treasure, is power-less. Peace be upon you, till next year!" This he says, and returns.

These words of the minister so affected Hasan that he was beside himself. At once he made arrangements to return. Coming to Basra, he took an oath never to laugh again in this world, till his ultimate destiny became clear to him. He flung himself into all manner of devotions and austerities, such that no man in his time could exceed that discipline.

Hasan of Basra and Abu Amr

It is related that Abu Amr, the leading authority on the reading of the Qur'an al-Karim, was teaching the Quran one day when suddenly a handsome boy arrived to join his class. Abu Amr gazed at the child improperly, and immediately he forgot the whole Quran, from the Alif of "al-Hamd" to the Seen of "wa al-Naas". A fire possessed him, and he lost all self-control. In this state he called on Hasan of Basra and described to him his predicament.

"Master," he wept bitterly, "such is the situation. I have forgotten the whole Quran."

Sayyiduna Hasan was most distressed to hear of his situation. "Now is the season of the pilgrimage," he said. "Go and perform the pilgrimage. When you have done that, repair to the mosque of Khaif. There you will see an old man seated in the prayer-niche. Do not spoil his time, but let him be until he is disengaged. Then ask him to say a prayer for you."

Abu Amr acted accordingly. Seated in a corner of the mosque, he observed a venerable elder and about him a circle of people seated. Some time passed; then a man entered, clad in spotless white robes. The people made way before him, greeted him, and conversed together. When the hour of prayer arrived, the man departed and the people departed with him, so that the elder remained alone.

Abu Amr then approached and saluted him. "In Allah's name, help me," he cried.

And he described his predicament. The elder, much concerned, raised his eyes to heaven.

“He had not yet lowered his head,” Abu Amr recounted, “when the Quran came back to me. I fell down before him for joy.”

“Who recommended me to you?” the elder asked. “Hasan of Basra,” Abu Amr replied.

“Anyone who has an Imam like Hasan,” the old man commented, “what need has he of another? Well, Hasan has exposed me. Now I will expose him. He rent my veil, and I will rend his as well. That man,” he went on, “in the white robes who entered after the afternoon prayer and left before the rest, and the others did him reverence — that man was Hasan. Every day he prays the afternoon prayer in Basra and then comes here, converses with me, and returns to Basra for the evening prayer. Anyone who has an Imam like Hasan, why should he ask me for a prayer?”

Hasan of Basra and the Fire-worshiper

Hasan had a neighbor named Simeon who was a fire-worshiper. Simeon fell ill and was at death’s door. Friends begged Hasan to visit him; he called, to find him in bed, blackened with fire and smoke.

“Fear God,” Hasan counseled him. “You have passed all your life amid fire and smoke. Accept Islam, that God may have mercy on you.”

“Three things hold me back from becoming a Muslim,” the fire-worshiper replied. “The first is, that you speak ill of the world, yet night and day you pur-sue worldly things. Secondly, you say that death is a fact to be faced, yet you make no preparation for death. In the third place, you say that God’s face shall be seen, yet today you do everything contrary to His good pleasure.”

“This is the token of those who know truly,” Hasan commented. “Now if believers act as you describe, what have you to say? They acknowledge the unity of God; whereas you have spent your life in the worship of fire. You who have worshiped fire for seventy years, and I who have never worshiped fire — we are both carried off to Hell. Hell will consume you and me. God will pay no regard to you; but if God so wills, the fire will not dare so much as to burn one hair of my body. For fire is a thing created by God; and the creature is subject to the Creator’s command. Come now, you

who have worshipped fire for seventy years; let us both put our hands into the fire, then you will see with your own eyes the impotence of fire and the omnipotence of God.”

So saying, Hasan thrust his hand into the fire and held it there. Not a particle of his body was affected or burnt. When Simeon saw this he was amazed. The dawn of true knowledge began to break.

“For seventy years I have worshiped fire,” he groaned. “Now only a breath or two remains to me. What am I to do?”

“Become a Muslim,” was Hasan’s reply.

“If you give it me in writing that God will not punish me,” said Simeon, “then I will believe. But until I have it in writing, I will not believe.”

Hasan wrote it down.

“Now order just witnesses of Basra to append their testimony.”

The witnesses endorsed the document. Then Simeon wept many tears and proclaimed the faith. He spoke his last testament to Hasan.

“When I die, bid them wash me, then commit me to the earth with your own hands, and place this document in my hand. This document will be my proof.”

Having charged Hasan thus, he spoke the attestation of faith and died. They washed his body, said the prayer over him, and buried him with the document in his hand. That night Hasan went to sleep pondering what he had done.

“How could I help a drowning man, seeing that I am drowning myself? Since I have no control over my own fate, why did I venture to prescribe how God should act?”

With this thought he fell asleep. He saw Simeon in a dream glowing like a candle; on his head a crown, robed in fine raiment, he was walking with a smile in the garden of Paradise.

“How are you, Simeon?” Hasan inquired.

“Why do you ask? You can see for yourself,” Simeon answered. “God Almighty of His bounty brought me nigh His presence and graciously showed me His face. The favours He showered upon me surpass all description. You have honoured your guarantee; so take your document. I have no further need of it.”

When Hasan awoke, he saw that parchment in his hand. “Lord God,” he cried, “I know well that what Thou doest is without cause, save of Thy bounty. Who shall suffer loss at Thy door? Thou grantest a Guebre of seventy years to come into Thy near presence because of a single utterance. How then wilt Thou exclude a believer of seventy years?”

Gems of Wisdom by Sayyiduna Imam Hasan al-Basri Radi ALLAHu Ta'ala Anho

That work that is free from wisdom becomes a burden. That silence that is free from wisdom is inattentiveness. That sight that is free from wisdom is disgraceful.

The magnificence of knowledge is with tolerance and that of tolerance is with knowledge.

The person who lives in the World safeguarding himself from the love of the World, has benefited himself and others.

Sorrow gives the soul strength.

The freedom of sight and tongue imprisons the soul.

Whoever ALLAH SubHanuhu wa Ta'ala wished to disgrace becomes engrossed in the search of wealth.

Those people are truly afraid who are truly afraid of ALLAH SubHanuhu wa Ta'ala.

The punishment of this World is that your heart becomes dead.

There is no greater or bigger animal that is more foul mouthed ruder and harsher than the Nafs.