

# The poisoning of Sayyidunā Ḥasan

By:

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(May Allah have Mercy on him)

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## Transliteration key

أ-'	ض - ḍ
آ - ā	ط - ṭ
ب - b	ظ - ṣ
ت - t	ع - ʿ
ث - th	غ - gh
ج - j	ف - f
ح - ḥ	ق - q
خ - kh	ك - k
د - d	ل - l
ذ - dh	م - m
ر - r	ن - n
ز - z	و - w, ū
س - s	ه - h
ش - sh	ي - y, ī
ص - ṣ	

## The poisoning of Sayyidunā Ḥasan

By: Mawlānā Muḥammad Ṭāhā Karaan رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ

### Question

It has been alleged that either Mu'āwiyah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ or his son Yazīd was involved in the poisoning of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. It is claimed that one of them persuaded one of Sayyidunā Ḥasan's رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ wives to administer poison to him. What is the truth of this claim?

### Answer

Any claim of a historical nature must be substantiated with proof. An accusation made without providing proof is slanderous, and should accordingly be dismissed as such.

But even the mere presentation of evidence is not sufficient to prove the claim. There is one very important condition that has to be met, and that is authenticity. The onus rests upon the claimant not only to provide evidence for his claim, but also to authenticate his evidence. For as long as he fails to prove its authenticity his claim is nothing more than an empty and worthless accusation.

This is a general rule which applies to all historical claims, and not only those to do with alleged misdeeds of the Ṣaḥābah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ. Let us look, for example, at the issue of the “satanic verses” which was so maliciously taken advantage of by the notorious Salman Rushdie. Mr. Rushdie did not suck the incident out of his thumb; he found it in historical books. However, what he failed to do was to authenticate. Why? The reason is obvious. He had his own agenda and his own preconceived notions.

Thus when someone accuses Sayyidunā Mu'āwiyah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ or anybody else of poisoning Sayyidunā Ḥasan رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, and does not care to examine the authenticity of the evidence for his accusation for no reason other than the fact that he dislikes

Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه, he is no less guilty than Salman Rushdie and his ilk. Let not your enmity for a person become your only motivation for finding him guilty.

And do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is [fully] Aware of what you do. (al-Mā'idah: 8)

It is authentically narrated that when Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه lay on his deathbed, dying from poisoning, his brother, Sayyidunā Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه came to him and asked him: “Brother, tell me who is the one who poisoned you.” Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه asked: “Why? That you may kill him?” Sayyidunā Ḥusayn said: “Yes,” to which Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه responded: “I will not tell you anything. If it is the one I think it is, then Allah’s revenge is harsher. And if it is not he, then by Allah, no innocent person will be killed on account of me.”<sup>11</sup>

This authentic narration shows that even Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه was not exactly sure of the identity of the poisoner. Over and above that, he refuses to tell his own brother who he suspects. It is strange that Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه himself displayed such great caution in the matter, fearing that he might be accusing an innocent person, but that people today can blurt out, without the blink of an eye, that “Mu‘āwiyah poisoned Ḥasan”.

The greatest concern Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه had was the preservation of the ummah’s unity. It was on account of this concern that he made peace with Mu‘āwiyah in 41 A.H. It was also this outstanding accomplishment of his which was predicted by his grandfather, Rasūlullah صلی الله علیه وسلم, in the well known ḥadīth:

This son of mine is a Sayyid, and soon the time will come when through him Allah will reconcile two great masses of Muslims.

He had this concern of not causing strife in the ummah, right up to the time of his demise. It was his dearest wish to be buried with his grandfather, Rasūlullah صلی الله علیه وسلم, in the room of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها, but he instructed Sayyidunā

Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه not to resort to violence in the event Banū Umayyah tried to prevent his burial there, and to bury him with his mother in Jannah al-Baqī. Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه was prepared to sacrifice the things nearest and dearest to him in order to preserve the peace and unity of the ummah.

Therefore, if it was Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه whom he suspected of having him poisoned he would rather have been expected to tell Sayyidunā Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه something like “I fear that you will cause civil war if you try to revenge yourself upon the one I suspect”. In the fact that he does not allude to the prospect of disunity and sedition at all, but rather expresses fear at an innocent person being killed on account of him, we therefore have reason to see that the one whom Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه suspected of poisoning him was not Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه.

Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه lived for ten more years after the passing of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه. In all that time the valiant and fearless Sayyidunā Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه was alive, and so was his brother, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah رضي الله عنه, his cousins ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه, and numerous other members of the Ahl al-Bayt. However, not a single one of them ever confronted Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه on the poisoning of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه. In fact, they maintained cordial relations with him, especially Ibn ‘Abbās and ‘Abd Allah ibn Ja‘far رضي الله عنه. They never uttered a word about Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah’s رضي الله عنه alleged involvement in the death of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه, neither in public nor to their closest followers. This gives us so much more reason to dismiss the allegation against Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه as unfounded.

Now let us look at the material in the books of history on the basis of which the allegation is made. The only report in which Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنه is implicated in the death of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه is narrated by the historian, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Wāqidi. This report appears as follows:

[Al-Wāqidi] says: I heard some people saying that Mu‘āwiyah secretly made one of his servants administer poison to him.<sup>2</sup>

As a report of history, this narration suffers from two fatally serious defects. The first is the universally recognised untrustworthiness of al-Wāqidī. Details of his unreliability as a narrator would probably fill several pages, but all of it may be suitably condensed into a statement by Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, who was his contemporary, and who knew him personally. Al-Shāfi‘ī has the following to say:

In Madinah there were seven people who used to forge chains of narration. One of them was al-Wāqidī.<sup>3</sup>

The second defect is much more glaring. Note that al-Wāqidī does not mention the names of his informants, and that he merely says “I heard some people say”. This particular report comes after a number of other reports in which al-Wāqidī clearly mentions the names of his informants. When he comes to this one, he merely says “I heard some people say”. Is it on the basis of such flimsy evidence that people today are bold enough to level an accusation of murder? Indeed, this smacks of a total disregard for academic integrity for the sake of nothing but personal sentiments and prejudice.

There is another report in which the wife of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه, namely Ja’dah bint al-Ash’ath, is implicated in his murder by poisoning. This report has it that it was Yazīd ibn Mu’āwiyah who set her up to do it, promising to marry her thereafter. This report is narrated by Muḥammad ibn Salam al-Jumaḥī. It is reproduced by al-Mizzī in *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* as follows:

Muḥammad ibn Salam al-Jumaḥī narrates on the authority of Ibn Ju’dubah that Ja’dah, the daughter of Ash’ath ibn Qays, was the wife of Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī. A message was sent to her in secret by Yazīd, telling her: “Poison Ḥasan and I will be your husband.” So she did it. When Ḥasan died she sent a message to Yazīd asking him to fulfil his pledge. But he told her: “By Allah, we did not approve of you as Ḥasan’s wife. Shall we approve of you as our own wife?”<sup>4</sup>

This is the way the report is found in the history books. To the uncritical reader who has no knowledge of the criteria of authenticity and their application, it

might well appear to be acceptable evidence. To the one whose emotions have already caused him to be favourably disposed towards Sayyidunā Ḥasan, and unfavourably disposed towards Yazīd, it is nothing less than incontrovertible evidence. But the true scholar never lets emotion make his decision for him. He first weighs the evidence, examines it and scrutinises it, and only if it merits approval and acceptance will he accept it. To the discerning scholar, emotions are shaped by evidence and not evidence by emotions.

Now we return to the report under discussion. Ibn Ju‘dubah, who is Muḥammad ibn Salam’s source for this report, is properly known as Yazīd ibn ‘Iyāḍ ibn Ju‘dubah. He lived in Madīnah during the time of Imām Mālik. Imām Mālik’s student, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Qāsim, once asked his opinion about a person called Ibn Sam‘an. The Imām replied: “He is a liar.” Ibn al-Qāsim then asked: “And Ibn Ju‘dubah?” Imām Mālik replied: “An even bigger liar, an even bigger liar.”<sup>5</sup> All other rijāl critics who ever expressed themselves on his status as a narrator have concurred with Imām Mālik in some way or the other.

Furthermore, Ibn Ju‘dubah died in the days of the ‘Abbāsīd Khalīfah, al-Mahdī, whose reign came to an end in 169 A.H. If we assume that that he died in 165 A.H, and that he lived a life of 70 years, we could say he was born in about 95 A.H. In other words, by the time of his birth, almost a half a century had passed after the death of Sayyidunā Ḥasan. The “Yazīd-Ja‘dah plot” therefore either came to his knowledge through sources whom he refrains to mention, or it was the product of his own mendacious and fertile imagination.

In light of what his contemporaries thought of him (Ahmad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Miṣrī, for example says of him “I think he used to invent hadith for the people.”<sup>6</sup>) one is inclined to believe that the whole plot was of his own invention. Looking at the times in which he lived — the early ‘Abbāsīd period—, we find more reason to believe that the report is a forgery by Ibn Ju‘dubah. During the early ‘Abbāsīd times sentiments were running high against the recently ousted Umayyads, and a person like the notorious Yazīd would have been the perfect scapegoat.

To come back now to the alleged involvement of Ja'dah bint Ash'ath: There is one other report which implicates her in the poisoning of Sayyidunā Ḥasan, but it does not mention anything about Yazīd.<sup>7</sup> It is narrated from Umm Mūsā, who was a bondswoman of Sayyidunā 'Alī.<sup>8</sup> The chain of narration up to Umm Mūsā is reliable. However, we might pose a question here with regard to Umm Mūsā herself: Did she identify Ja'dah as the culprit out of knowledge of her guilt, or must her words here be construed as the emotional outburst of a bereaved woman who simply must find someone to blame for the cause of her bereavement?

We do not pose this question out of unnecessary scepticism. There are two things which prompt us to ask it: Firstly, Sayyidunā Ḥasan's ﷺ own reluctance to name the person he suspected. Keep in mind also that he himself merely suspected, and did not know it for a fact. Secondly, if there were reasonable grounds for suspecting Ja'dah bint Ash'ath, no man would readily marry her, especially a man of the Ahl al-Bayt. But with Ja'dah we find that after the demise of Sayyidunā Ḥasan ﷺ she was married by his father's cousin Sayyidunā 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās ﷺ, and that she bore him a son, Muḥammad, and a daughter, Quraybah.<sup>9</sup> From the above discussion we may then draw the following conclusions:

- » The report implicating Mu'āwiyah ﷺ is narrated by an extremely unreliable narrator— al-Wāqidī— from unnamed people.
- » The report implicating Yazīd and Ja'dah are narrated by a known liar— Ibn Ju'dubah— who was born almost 50 years after the incident and names no sources at all. His report comes into circulation during the early 'Abbāsīd period in which anti-Umayyad sentiments, and more particularly anti-Yazīd sentiments, are common.
- » The report from Umm Mūsā which implicates Ja'dah is more likely the emotional outburst of a bereaved woman than an allegation based on factual knowledge.

- » Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه himself refused to disclose the identity of the one he suspected. He restrained his brother Sayyidunā Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه from taking any action.
- » After the death of Sayyidunā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه the Ahl al-Bayt maintained good relations with Mu‘āwiyah in Damascus.

In light of the above we fully endorse the statement by Ibn Kathīr that none of these reports are authentic.<sup>10</sup> We hope that this demonstration — of how the words of a bereaved woman, a report by unknown reporters, and a forgery by a known liar came to be regarded as factual history — will bring to light the need of critically examining historical sources before levelling accusations against anybody.

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## Notes and References

1. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* vol. 7 p. 41 (Dar al-Ḥadīth, Cairo 1414/1994); al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* vol. 3 p. 273 (7th ed., Mu’assasah al-Risālah, Beirut 1410/1990); al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* vol. 6 p. 251 (Mu’assasah al-Risālah, Beirut 1413/1992); Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah* vol. 2 p. 13 (Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d.); Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti‘āb* vol. 1 p. 390 (Dar al-Jil, Beirut 1412/1992). The narration is authentic on account of the fact that all its narrators are well known for reliability and trustworthiness, and that the chain of narration is uninterrupted from beginning to end.
2. *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* vol. 7 p. 41; *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* vol. 6 p. 251
3. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* vol. 26 p. 194, in a footnote.
4. *ibid.* vol. 6 p. 253
5. *ibid.* vol. 32 p. 223
6. *ibid.* vol. 32 p. 224

7. ibid. vol. 6 p. 253

8. Ibn Ḥajar: *Lisān al-Mizān* vol. 7 p. 543 (Dar al-Fikr, Beirut 1407/1987)

9. Ibn Sa'd: *al-Tabaqāh al-Kubrā'* vol. 5 p. 241 (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut 1410/1990)

10. *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* vol. 7 p. 41