

Hasan b. 'Ali (624/5-669 C.E.)

Grandson of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, Hasan is regarded by the Shi'is as the second divinely appointed imam or leader, having been designated by his father, 'Ali b. Abu Talib, to succeed him. Many anecdotes and traditions that attest to Muhammad's love for his grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, have been preserved. Among these is, "al-Hasan and al-Husayn are the masters of the youth of Paradise." The Prophet is also reported to have shown his special affection for Hasan by interrupting one of his sermons and descending from the pulpit in order to pick up Hasan who had fallen down.

Due to his close relationship to Muhammad, Hasan was highly respected by many in the community. He is also reported to have resembled his grandfather very closely. With his father, mother, and brother, Hasan said to have joined the Prophet under a mantle. According to Shi'i exegetes, these five were declared in the Qur'an to be the people of the house and free from all impurity (33:33). The Shi'is have used such anecdotes to justify the right of the Prophet's descendants to the leadership (imamate) of the community. Hasan is also said to have been pious, of a mild disposition, and never lost his composure.

When a Khariji killed 'Ali in Kufa in 661 C.E., many of his followers pledged allegiance to Hasan and proclaimed him as the next caliph. Mu'awiya b. Abu Sufyan (d. 680), the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, refused to recognize Hasan's leadership and prepared for war instead. Hasan responded by mobilizing his forces but, due to lack of support and the perceived need to preserve the unity of the community, he contemplated signing a peace treaty with his foe. Many in Hasan's army were unhappy at this. Some of

his followers attacked him, resulting in him being wounded in the thigh. Mass desertions from Hasan's army meant that he had to abdicate the leadership of the community in favor of Mu'awiya. His caliphate did not last for not more than eight months.

Sources present conflicting details on Hasan's agreement with Mu'awiya. Most agree that Hasan stipulated that Mu'awiya should compensate him, that his followers were not to be harassed and that, after Mu'awiya's death, the leadership should be restored to Hasan, or, if he was not alive, to his younger brother, Husayn. Hasan's abdication provoked negative reactions among his followers. Many Shi'is felt humiliated by the peace treaty.

Hasan retreated to Medina where he lived quietly, without engaging in any political activity until he died. Hostile sources claim that he would often marry and divorce, even suggesting that he had over sixty wives. He was pejoratively called "mitlak" (divorcer). Shi'i sources indicate that at Mu'awiya's instigation and promises, one of Hasan's wives, Ja'da, poisoned him. Although Hasan wanted to be buried next to his grandfather's grave in Medina, some members of the community (sources suggest Muhammad's wife 'A'isha was one of them) refused to honor his wishes. To avoid an armed conflict, Husayn decided to have him buried in the common cemetery at al-Baqi.

To affirm his "holy" status, Hasan is credited with many legendary stories and miracles in Shi'i hagiographic literature. For example, when he was born, he reportedly praised God and recited passages from the Qur'an. Gabriel is alleged to have rocked his cradle, showing the divine blessings and favors on the family of the Prophet.

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