

No One Saw

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Abstract: *This article is a story about the life of Imam al-Javad (as), the 9th Shia Imam.*

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*I*t was early in the morning and I could sense the fresh air of the previous night moving around the house. I looked at the single, tall palm tree, in the middle of the yard. Being heavy hearted, I wanted to sit next to the tree for a while. Moments later, I heard my mother coughing from inside the house. She had been sick for a few days and needed my nursing. I went back to the room and held a bowl of water to her lips. She drank a bit and felt better. I decided to go to the bazaar and buy some milk for her. I went to the backyard. A cool breeze was blowing slowly and moved the palm leaves playfully. Against my will, I moved away from this scene and stepped out of the house.

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*T*he town of Samarra was full of fruit orchards. The earth of the alleys smelled of flowers. Tree branches stooped over the walls and greeted the pedestrians. You could see a beautiful clean stream from anywhere you passed. Anyone who walked in the town was overwhelmed from these beautiful scenes.

One by one, I left behind different shops until I came across the milk shop. When the milkman saw me, he said with a loud voice, "Hello son of Khaled! You haven't been around for a few days!"

I told him that I had stayed at home for a few days because of my mother's illness. Surprised, he asked, "So, you don't know about what's been going around in town?"

"No," I answered, "if you have any news tell me about it."

He brought his face close and said, "They have brought a prisoner to town yesterday. They say he claims to be a prophet. He is an old man from Damascus..."

I stepped away aimlessly and without direction. The milkman cried with surprise, “Where are you going Ali ibn khaled?”

I didn’t answer back. I was thinking with myself, how was it possible for a person to call himself a prophet while two hundred years had passed from the prophet-hood of the Prophet Muhammad (s), and all the Muslims knew him as the final prophet. The only answer was that perhaps the old man was crazy!

When I came to myself, I had the tall strong walls of the prison in front of me. I have forgotten to tell you that the town of Samarra with all its beauty, was a military town and soldiers and government officials could be seen everywhere. One of the biggest suburbs of the town was called *Askar* and the town's prison was placed in that suburb. I looked around. The towers of the prison seemed taller than before, and its walls stronger and taller than ever. I was sad that I couldn’t fly over the walls like a bird.

Suddenly I remembered one of my old friends. He was my childhood playmate and he worked in the town prison. I hadn't seen him for years and had no news from him. I felt a power inside me. I went forward and asked the guards about my friend. One of the guards knew him but said, “It is now a year that he has moved to Baghdad and now he is one of the Caliph's bodyguards.”

It was a good opportunity. I used my friendship and asked that guard to take me to that old man. First, he would not accept but after my insistence, he gave in. I thanked him happily and promised him to return his kindness some day. Then I looked at the sky and thanked God in my heart.

I saw the sun peeping from behind the clouds and smiling.

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The prison was dark and damp. We went through narrow passages that had low ceilings and mud-built walls. If it were not for the light of the torches, we could have hardly seen in front of our steps. The sound of crying, moaning, and chains, could be heard throughout the prison. Fear could be felt from every corner. After putting behind some passages, we came to an old wooden door. A guard -with lots of keys belted on his waist- put a key to the lock, and hit against the door with his leg. The door opened with a shrieking sound. The light of the torch, which was in the hand of one of the guards shone on the old man's face.

It was he; the one whom they said had claimed to be a prophet.

I took the torch from the guard and went down the stairs. I stepped closer to him. His hair and beard were gray and he sat in a corner. Next to him was nothing but a pot of water and a clay bowl. He opened his eyelids and in one look studied me from top to bottom. My heart trembled. I sat next to him quietly. A few minutes passed in silence. Although I could hardly speak, I said to him, "I have heard from people that you know yourself to be a prophet, is this true?"

The old man slowly took his eyes off me and fixed them to the ground. He sighed and said, "Pity that people are simple-minded and easy believers."

I could feel grief and sorrow in his voice. I asked about him and his name. He said that he was from Damascus and that he had spent his life in the way of worshipping God. He talked with serenity and dignity.

I asked about his imprisonment. He did not answer. I asked again. He shook his head in disappointment and said,

"We have different beliefs, so how can you understand the truth of the story I talk about?"

I smartly answered, “Don’t you want to put me on the same side as yourself?”

He thought in silence for a while and then said, “The story started in a shrine in Damascus. It was for some time that I prayed and worshiped God there. One day, when I had raised my hands to God, a voice called me and said, “Rise!” I turned towards the sound. I saw a well-dressed man in front of myself who had a blessed face. I got up involuntarily and followed behind him. Only a few moments had passed that he stopped in front of a mosque with tall minarets. He turned towards me and said, “Do you know this mosque?”

“Yes,” I answered. “This is the Mosque of Kuffa.” ...after praying we left that mosque. We had not taken many steps, when I found myself facing the Mosque of the Prophet (s) in Medina. We prayed there too, and started again. We walked a bit further and I suddenly saw myself in Mecca, next to Ka’ba. After circling Ka’ba, we walked on again. This time I found myself in Damascus; the same place I had been before this mysterious trip. At this moment, that person disappeared from my eyes and left me alone with a sea of wonder. A year passed on until one night, for the second time, the same story and the same trip was repeated, with the difference that this time, I begged him for God’s sake to tell me his name. Do you know who he was? He was Imam al-Javad (as) the ninth Imam of us Shias!”

When I found out that he is a follower of Imam al-Javad (as), I was even more surprised. How could it be possible for a person to be a Muslim, count himself as a follower of the Imams, and yet claim to be a prophet? Without hesitation, I asked the old man, “What does this story has to do with claiming to be a prophet?”

The old man turned his face towards me and stared into my eyes. Then with a trembling voice said, “I swear that I have never called myself a prophet. All these are lies. My only mistake was that I told this incident to my friends and family and they

retold it to others, till the news reached Abdul Malek. He ordered that I be brought to your town and be imprisoned, and accused me of claiming to be a prophet.

I trembled all over when I heard the name, Abdul Malek. Suddenly everything seemed dark to me. I went deep in thought. He was the vizier of the Abbasid caliph Mo'tasem; a stonehearted vicious man who did not know friend from foe and had mercy on no one. By his order, they had made a furnace with small and large nails sticking out of its walls. They would throw his enemies in the burning furnace, burning them alive. Tears filled in my eyes and I felt sorry for the old man. I thought with myself that perhaps they had given false news to the vizier about this old man. What if a little mistake or lie had caused great trouble for him? As I was leaving him alone in the darkness, I said, "I will do all I can, to save your life."

From the split between the wall and the closing rusty door, I saw the old man fare-welling me with a smiling face. I will never forget the look on his face.

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At home, I sadly sat in a corner with my hands circled around my knees. My mother woke up coughing. Her coughs reminded me that I was supposed to buy milk in the morning, but the excitement of seeing the old man had made me forget. I told the story to my mother. She tried to calm me down and said, "The old man's words cannot be trusted. If he is telling the truth, God will show a way for his freedom. If he is lying, then better that he stays where he is."

For me who had spoken with the old man and still felt his voice in my ears, it was hard to think him crazy or a liar. On the other hand, I could not just sit down and see the old man's life ending. I recalled the happenings of the day a few times. Suddenly, I remembered what one of the agents had said about

my friend being a special guard of the caliph. It was better to ask him to inform the vizier about the old man. I took a pen and paper with excitement, and wrote everything to him.

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Days went on from that event. My mother's health was improving and I could spend more time outside the house. Every day, when I came home, I asked mother, "Has there been a letter or a message?"

And mothers answer would always be the same: "no!"

During this time, I was worried about the old man who was awaiting his death on one hand and on the other hand, I was searching for a way to find out whether the old man was telling the truth. Finding the truth was more important for me than the old man's destiny, because if he had told the truth, then I had to believe in the Imamate of Imam al-Javad (*as*), and be on the same belief as the Shias. What he had said is possible only through an Imam and a successor of the Prophet (*s*).

Finally, one morning, I heard a few knocks on the door of the house. I got up and opened the door. In front of me, stood a young man with his horse's bridle in his hands. He looked very tired, and his face and clothes were covered in dust. He greeted me and said, "I come from Baghdad, I have brought a letter for you." I happily received the letter from him, and opened it quickly while saying goodbye. I was shocked when I saw what was written in the letter. The Caliph's vizier, Muhammad ibn Abdul Malek had written in his own handwriting, "Ask the same person who takes the old man from Damascus to Medina and Mecca, then returns him to come and free him from our prisons."

What the Vizier meant by 'the same person' was Imam al-Javad (*as*). I wiped the cold sweat, which had settled on my forehead. I didn't know what to say. I gazed at the date palm tree in the middle of the yard. It was bent towards the ground and it

did not move. He too, seemed sad and gloomy. It was clear from the vizier's answer that they had imprisoned the old man because of their hatred towards the leader of the Shias and claims of prophet-hood were only excuses. The Caliph and his vizier feared that if the people heard the story of the old man they too would become believers of Imam al-Javad (*as*). That was why they had sent the old man to prison. I spent one or two days looking for a solution but I came to no answer. It was as if the old man had to stay in jail until he was punished.

Finally, I decided to give the old man another visit to inform him about the Vizier's answer. As I was going, I remembered those fearful scenes; narrow passages, small dark rooms, chains clattering, prisoners moaning, and the sad old man, sitting in the prison all alone.

From a distance, I saw many soldiers running from one place to another. I went closer. They were all angry and distressed. I was amazed. I saw two guards running towards their commander, saying, "We searched everywhere...there is no trace of him!"

There was a great crowd around the great gate of the prison. I saw some guards talking in a corner. I went forward and asked, "What's happened?"

One of them moved his hands like two wings and said, "It's as if he has flown away."

The other guard said, "Maybe he has gone into the ground; like a drop of water!"

"Who are you talking about?" I asked, surprised.

"That old man from Damascus who was jailed here. No one knows how he has got out of prison."

I was happy all over. I wanted to scream and thank God. Everything was clear for me. Imam al-Javad (*as*) had come to help the old man. And this time too, he had taken him from one place to another, just like the old man had said. But this time, the old man wasn't saved alone; I considered myself saved too. Imam al-Javad (*as*) had helped me too and he had flown me from the land of darkness to the heavens of light and guidance. Now, I knew that he is the Imam and successor of the Prophet of God (*s*). I felt very light. I ran as fast as I could towards home to make mother happy too.