

Arba'in of Imam al-Husayn (a)

Arba'in of Imam al-Husayn (a) (Arabic: اربعين الحسيني) is 20th day of Safar in the Hijri Lunar calendar and the anniversary of the 40th day after the Battle of Karbala when Imam al-Husayn (a) and his companions were martyred on the Day of Ashura, (Muharram 10, 61 AH/October 10, 680). It is reported that the Captives of the Battle of Karbala came to visit Imam al-Husayn (a) in Karbala on Safar 20, 61/November 19, 680) on their return from Syria to Medina.

In a hadith from Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a), ziyarah of Arba'in is considered among the sings of the faithful.

This day is a national holiday in Iran. Shi'a mourn on the day of Arba'in and mourning groups rally in streets. In recent years, great procession of Shi'a who try to arrive in Karbala on the day of Arba'in has become one of the most important mourning ceremonies of Shi'a around the world and it has even turned into one of the largest religious processions on a global scale . Currently the majority of foreign pilgrims in this procession are from Iran.



Mourning of Shi'a Muslims on the Day of Arba'in, Bayn al-Haramayn, Karbala

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In Arabic, Arba'in means the 40th day and 20th of [Safar](#), which is 40 days after the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (a) on the Day of 'Ashura, is called Arba'in al-Husayni or simply Arba'in. The importance of this day lies in the fact that based on historical accounts, [Jabir b. 'Abd Allah al-Ansari](#) visited the grave of Imam al-Husayn (a) on this day as the first pilgrim ever visiting this grave. In some sources, it is reported that, in addition to Jabir, remaining members of Imam al-Husayn's (a) family returned to Karbala on this day and visited the graves of Imam al-Husayn (a) and other martyrs of Karbala.

Visit of Jabir

Jabir b. 'Abd Allah al-Ansari, one of the [companions of the Prophet \(s\)](#) is known to be the first pilgrim and visitor of the grave [Imam al-Husayn \(a\)](#) after his [martyrdom](#). Accompanied by ['Atiyya al-'Awfi](#), he arrived in Karbala on the first Arba'in of the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (a) in 61 AH/680 and visited Imam al-Husayn (a).^[1]

Return of the Captives to Karbala

There is three opinions among Shi'a scholars about the return of the [captives](#) passing [Karbala](#) on their way to [Medina](#)

- Some scholars including [al-Muhaddith al-Nuri](#) in his *al-Lu'lu' wa l-marjan*,^[2] and his student [Shaykh 'Abbas Qumi](#) in his *Muntaha l-ama*^[3] believe that the mentioned visit did not happen in the first year after the [Battle of Karbala](#) and that it was not even possible at all. Before al-Muhaddith al-Nuri, [al-Sayyid b. Tawus](#) expressed his doubt about the issue as well in his *Iqbal al-a'mal*.

- Some scholars confirmed that the captives have visited Karbala, and considered a later time for it, end of Safar or beginning of Rabi' I or later.
- Others believe that the caravan of the captives arrived in Iraq from Syria and arrived in Karbala on the day of Arba'in and after visiting Imam al-Husayn (a) moved towards Medina. They also believe that they visited Jabir b. 'Abd Allah al-Ansari and some of Banu Hashim as well. This opinion is mentioned in the *al-Luhuf* of al-Sayyid b. Tawus.^[4]

Due to these conflicting views, some scholars have tried to author some books to prove that the return of the remaining members of Imam al-Husayn's (a) family to Karbala on Safar 20, 61/680 has been, in fact, possible and that the narrations referring to this return are reliable. One of the most famous and comprehensive works is authored by Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Qadi Tabataba'i called *Tahqiq darbara-yi awwal Arba'in-i Sayyid al-Shuhada (a)* (Research on the first Arba'in of Imam al-Husayn) which has been written to refute the views of al-Muhaddith al-Nuri and Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi.

Ziyarah of Arba'in

Main article: Ziyarah of Arba'in

In a hadith from Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a), the faithful are described as having five signs, one of which is ziyarah of Arba'in.^[5]

Also, a ziyarah text for the day of Arba'in is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a)^[6] and Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi has mentioned it in his *Mafatih al-jinan* in the third chapter with the title of "ziyarah Arba'in".

Qadi Tabataba'i says that Shi'a also call ziyarah of Arba'in, "Maradd al-Ra's" (return of the head), suggesting that when the captives came back to Karbala on that day, they also brought the holy head of Imam al-Husayn (a) and buried it with the body.^[7]

Procession of Arba'in

Main article: Procession of Arba'in

Since the ziyarah of Arba'in has been strongly recommended, Shi'a, especially Shi'a of Iraq, move towards Karbala every year on the occasion of Arba'in. This procession, which is usually made on foot, is considered as one of the most crowded rallies in the world. In recent years, following the collapse of the previous regime in Iraq, the number of these pilgrims has multiplied. In 2013, some reports estimated the number of pilgrims attending Karbala to be 15 million.

Qadi Tabataba'i wrote that procession of Arba'in towards Karbala has been a common practice among Shi'a since the time of Imams (a) and Shi'a used to perform it even at the time of Umayyads and Abbasids.



Procession of Arba'in

Arba'in Intifada

Main article: Arba'in Intifada

Baath party had put restrictions on holding religious ceremonies. It was also forbidden to erect any stand or any form of procession on the road to Karbala. However, on Safar 15, 1398/January 25, 1978 people of Najaf prepared themselves for Arba'in procession. A caravan of 30 thousand people started to move towards Karbala. It was confronted by the

government from the beginning and a number of people were martyred. Finally, on the road to Karbala the army attacked people and arrested thousands of them. A number of people were killed, some were sentenced to death and some others were sentenced to life in prison.

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim were influential in this intifada. Imam Khomeini acknowledged this public movement as well.

See Also

- [Imam al-Husayn \(a\)](#)
- [Battle of Karbala](#)
- [Timeline of the Battle of Karbala](#)
- [Procession of Arba'in](#)
- [Ziyarah of Arba'in](#)
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Notes

1. Al-Qummi, *Safinat al-bihar*, vol. 8, p. 383
2. Nuri, *al-Lu'lu' wa l-marjan*, pp. 208-209
3. Al-Qummi, *Muntaha l-amal*, pp. 524-525
4. Ibn Tawus, *al-Luhuf*, p. 225
5. Al-Tusi, *Tahdhib al-ahkam*, vol. 6, p. 52
6. Al-Tusi, *Tahdhib al-ahkam*, vol. 6, p. 113
7. Qadi Tabataba'i, *Tahqiq darbara-yi awwal Arba'in-i Sayyid al-Shuhada*, p. 2

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