



Delineating the Conceptual Scope of the Martyr in Islamic Traditions: An Analysis of the Distinction between Virtuous Martyrs and Those Killed in Battle

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(Received: March 2026, Accepted: August 2026)

DOI: 10.22034/hsr.2026.52401.1155

Abstract

In Islamic religious literature, the concept of the martyr is typically associated with Muslims killed in legitimate battle. However, analysis of the verses and traditions reveals that the term's scope extends beyond this conventional application to include individuals who die outside the battlefield. The present study examines the traditional and

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hadith-based foundations for the semantic expansion of martyr, aiming to delineate its limits and categories. It specifically investigates whether the legal rulings and spiritual virtues of martyrdom are exclusive to those killed in battle or also apply to other cases identified in the traditions. Previous scholarship has not sufficiently clarified the range of individuals to whom the title martyr applies or the criteria for its attribution within Islamic textual tradition. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical methodology based on library research, this study analyzes relevant narrations and demonstrates that, while exclusive legal rulings for those killed in battle do not extend to other cases, the hadith corpus applies the designation martyr to a broader spectrum of individuals whose deaths are marked by spiritual merit and virtue. Simultaneously, Qur'anic evidence suggests that those killed in the path of God possess a higher spiritual rank, as the Qur'an consistently employs derivatives of the root (*q-t-l*) in this context rather than the term martyr.

Keywords: Martyr, Martyrdom, *Jihād*, Virtue, One Killed in Battle.

Introduction

The Islamic scriptural sources emphasize the exalted station of the martyr before God. The Messenger of God described being killed in the path of God as the noblest of deaths (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 4, 402). The elevated status of the martyr is so widely recognized that even in non-Muslim societies, individuals who sacrifice their lives in defense of their homeland are accorded

The term martyr appears in hadith literature across diverse contexts, leading to conceptual overlap and ambiguity. Therefore, a precise clarification of its meaning, grounded in the instances found in the traditions, is necessary. Within the Islamic legal tradition, the immediate understanding of martyr refers to an individual killed on the battlefield under specific legal conditions, for which the obligations of ritual washing and shrouding are waived according to Islamic law.

On the other hand, numerous individuals are described as martyrs in the traditions despite having died a natural death or having passed away outside the battlefield. One example is *Sa'd ibn Mu'adh*, who was wounded during the Battle of "*al-Aḥzāb*" but died later from his injuries. The Messenger of God performed the ritual washing for him (Muḥammad ibn Sa'd, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 3, 327), and additional narrations concerning this category will be discussed in detail below. In this second category, traditions may explicitly designate individuals as martyrs or describe them as occupying the rank of a martyr or receiving the reward of a martyr. Examples include individuals killed while resisting oppression or women who die during childbirth (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 5, 52; Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shaybah, 1997: 2, 380). These observations underscore the necessity of clarifying the conceptual scope of martyrdom.

Despite the widespread application of the title martyr, the precise boundaries of its meaning and the criteria for its attribution remain inadequately clarified. Some narrations explicitly identify specific persons or groups as martyrs, while others use expressions such as

"The rank of a martyr" or "He shall have the reward of a martyr." The central question is whether the application of martyr in these cases constitutes a literal usage within the traditions or whether distinctions should be made between literal, analogical, and honorific or virtue-based applications. Additionally, it is necessary to determine whether these categories differ in spiritual rank and merit. Additionally, the term martyr refers to individuals who were not killed in the literal sense. This demonstrates the legitimacy of employing the word martyr in a broader meaning that includes both those who are killed and those who are not. An example is the woman who dies in childbirth, described as a martyr (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 3, 561). Nevertheless, from the perspective of spiritual status, it remains possible that actually being killed constitutes an essential criterion for attaining the highest degree of martyrdom, and evidence supporting this possibility will be presented.

The present study, utilizing a library-based examination of primary sources and a descriptive, juristic-analytical methodology, aims to clarify the concept of martyrdom and its various categories as presented in the Qur'an, hadith literature, and the works of Muslim jurists.

1. Research Background

In surveying the literature on the concept of the martyr and martyrdom in Islamic jurisprudential and hadith sources, it is evident that most studies have focused either on the legal rulings concerning the martyr killed in battle or on the Qur'anic concept of martyrdom.

52 Comparatively little attention has been devoted to defining the extent

to which the title martyr is expanded in the hadith literature or to distinguishing between its various degrees and applications.

Among the notable works, the late Sayyid *Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm*, in "*Mustamsak al-ʿUrwah*," (Hakim and Yazdi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 7, 278-279; see also: Ṭūsī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 7, 278-279; Najafī, n.d.: 4, 86-90) primarily explains the legal rulings relating to martyrs with particular emphasis on those killed in battle. Likewise, the article "A Re-examination of the Jurisprudential Rulings Concerning the Martyrdom of *Ḥamzah*," (Bani Hasan & Rafiei, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 11, 7-19) examines detailed legal questions relating to battlefield martyrs without addressing the broader semantic scope of the term martyr in the hadith literature.

Within the field of semantics, studies such as "A Critical Examination of the Hadith-Centered Approach to Establishing a Semantic Relationship Between Martyr and One Killed in the Path of God in the Qur'anic Text," (Khakpour & Shahandeh, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 88, 144-165) "The Characteristics of the Martyr from the Perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith," (Jafari & Rezaei, 2024 AD/1403 SH: 59, 10-25) and "The Semantic Development of the Word Martyrdom in the Qur'an" (Islami, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 2, 97-136) have concentrated primarily on analyzing the Qur'anic concept of martyrdom or describing the characteristics of the martyr.

Other studies have approached the subject from cultural or jurisprudential perspectives, including "The Role of Promoting the Culture of Self-Sacrifice and Martyrdom from the Perspective of the Noble Qur'an and the Traditions," (Safari Garayli, n.d.: 431-445)

"Subject Classification and Jurisprudential Rulings of the Martyr According to the Schools of Islamic Law," (Teymourifar, 2017 AD/1397 SH) and "The Rulings Concerning the Martyr in the Jurisprudence of the Islamic Schools." (Jannati, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 25, 70-83)

These studies likewise focus predominantly on the martyr in its conventional legal and social sense. Despite these valuable contributions, none has independently and systematically examined the full scope of the application of the title martyr in the hadith corpus, distinguished between its literal, analogical, and virtue-based usages, or analyzed the differences in spiritual rank among these categories. This gap in the literature underscores the need for the present study, which seeks to provide a precise clarification of the limits and gradations of the title martyr within the hadith tradition.

2. The Lexical Meaning of Martyr

One of the primary meanings attributed to the root (*sh-h-d*) by Arabic lexicographers is knowledge and awareness. This meaning is used in contexts where nothing remains hidden from the knowledge of the one described as martyr (Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 6, 47; Ibn Manẓūr, n.d.: 3, 238).

A second meaning refers to a person who not only possesses knowledge but also declares, testifies to, or makes that knowledge known. An example appears in the Qur'anic verse: "...The testimony between you, when death approaches one of you at the time of making a bequest, shall be given by two witnesses..." (al-Mā'idah 106) (Ibn

Sīdah, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 4, 181)

Some lexicographers have also understood martyr to mean "One who is living." According to this interpretation, the reason for this designation is that the souls of the martyrs are present in the "Abode of Peace" and enjoy its blessings, unlike other souls that have not attained such a rank. In support of this interpretation, they cite the Qur'anic verse: "Do not think of those who have been killed in the way of God as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision." (Āli 'Imrān: 169)

The Qur'an thus describes those killed in the path of God as living and sustained by divine provision (Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 6, 47). Accordingly, it has been argued that the title martyr is applied to them in light of this distinctive form of life. Evidence from major Arabic dictionaries indicates that the root (*sh-h-d*) fundamentally conveys the meanings of presence, awareness, witnessing, and declaration. Consequently, in its earliest usage, the word martyr denoted a witness or one who possesses knowledge, and was used in reference to God, the angels, and the prophets (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d.: 3, 238; Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 6, 47; Ibn Sīdah, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 4, 181).

Nevertheless, in the Islamic religious texts, particularly the Noble Qur'an, the word also came to be associated with those who are killed in the path of God. Over time, within Islamic religious discourse, martyr became established as the standard designation for one who is killed in God's cause. It therefore appears that this technical usage developed gradually through an expansion of the word's original lexical meaning within the context of the Qur'an, the hadith literature,

and the broader Islamic tradition.

3. The Technical Meaning of Martyr in the Qur'an and Hadith

In conventional jurisprudential terminology and in the understanding of the religious community, the term martyr refers to one who is killed in the path of God during jihad. This definition forms the basis of the legal rulings concerning martyrs in many classical works of Islamic jurisprudence (Najafi, n.d.: 4, 86-90; Ḥakīm, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 7, 98).

A study of the hadith literature, however, demonstrates that the designation martyr is not confined solely to those killed in the path of God. Rather, a number of traditions apply this title to other categories of people as well, for example, a person killed while defending his property or family, or individuals who die as a result of certain hardships or afflictions (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 5, 52). This broader usage makes it necessary to carefully investigate the limits and extent of the title martyr's application in both the Qur'an and the hadith literature.

The technical concept of martyrdom encompasses several categories. In the Noble Qur'an, however, only one of these categories is explicitly presented, namely, being killed in the path of God. This concept is consistently expressed through derivatives of the root (*q-t-l*), as in the following verse: "Let those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter fight in the way of God. Whoever fights in the way of God and is killed or achieves victory, We shall grant him a tremendous reward." (al-Nisā': 74)

56 Other Qur'anic verses convey essentially the same idea and do not

introduce additional points directly relevant to the present discussion.

The hadith literature, however, presents a broader picture. Numerous traditions concerning the martyr have been transmitted, and they may be classified into three principal categories:

- 1) The first category consists of traditions referring to individuals who are killed during the course of battle and who, upon fulfilling certain legal conditions, are exempt from the rites of ritual washing and shrouding.
- 2) The second category comprises traditions that designate individuals as martyrs even though they did not die in combat. These include persons who die outside the battlefield, whether through natural causes or through the shedding of their blood. Within this category, some narrations explicitly employ the word martyr, while others use expressions such as "Having the rank of a martyr" or "Like a martyr."
- 3) The third category includes traditions that further broaden the concept of martyrdom, encompassing additional cases that may not constitute a separate category alongside the previous two. Rather, these traditions are cited insofar as they support the permissibility of extending the application of the term martyr beyond those killed in battle, or even beyond those killed in general.

A different classification of the traditions concerning martyrdom may also be proposed, one that arguably corresponds more closely to the Qur'anic presentation and may explain the differing degrees of spiritual rank among martyrs:

- 1) The first group consists of traditions referring to martyrdom in cases where the designation of being killed genuinely applies, **57**

whether the individual is killed on the battlefield, on its periphery, or even in circumstances where no formal battle has taken place, provided that the person's blood is shed in the cause of God.

2) The second group consists of traditions concerning individuals who die natural deaths but to whom the title martyr is nevertheless applied, or who are counted among the martyrs, by virtue of some special characteristic, such as love for the Family of Muḥammad, or because of a particular place or time in which they died.

In some jurisprudential works, the traditions relating to martyrs have generally been examined under two broad headings: those concerning the battlefield martyr and the legal rulings applicable to him, and those in which the title martyr is applied to persons other than one killed in battle (cf. Hakim, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 7, 98-110). Since the present study seeks to clarify the scope of the term martyr's application in the hadith literature, a more detailed threefold classification is preferable. Accordingly, the traditions may be organized into:

- Traditions concerning those killed in battle, to whom specific legal rulings apply;
- Traditions in which the title martyr is applied to individuals outside the battlefield, whether their deaths involve bloodshed or not;
- Traditions in which the concept of martyrdom is expanded in a virtue-based sense, referring primarily to spiritual reward and elevated rank.

This first classification will serve as the analytical framework for
58 the present study. Nevertheless, an alternative classification based on

the manner of death, whether by killing or by natural causes, may also be advanced. Such a classification is particularly useful in analyzing the differing spiritual degrees and merits of the various categories of martyrs and will be discussed in the concluding section of this article.

4. Traditions Concerning the Battlefield Martyr

There is no dispute that a Muslim who is killed in battle in the presence of the Prophet or an Imam is regarded as a martyr, and the traditions clearly affirm this point. None of the Imami jurists has disagreed with this principle, except with respect to certain conditions and details. Indeed, it has been claimed that there is a consensus among all Muslim scholars on this matter, with the exception of *Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib* and *al-Ḥasan* (Baḥrānī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 413; Ḥillī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 371).

The more significant question concerns the conditions necessary for a person to qualify as one killed in battle. The jurists have identified several conditions that, upon their fulfillment, exempt such a person from ritual washing and shrouding. These conditions may be summarized under three principal headings.

4-1. Being Killed While Fighting under the Leadership of the Impeccable Imam

Some jurists maintained that the individual must be killed while fighting under the banner of the infallible Imam (Ṭūsī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 84; Fāḍil Hindī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 84; Muḥid, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 84). The majority of jurists, however, reject this restriction. Certain traditions also indicate that anyone killed in a legitimate battle,

even during the period of the Imam's occultation, is entitled to the special legal rulings applicable to the battlefield martyr (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 210).

It is therefore plausible that the requirement of fighting alongside the Imam is not itself an essential condition for these legal rulings but rather serves as an evidentiary indicator of the legitimacy of the struggle. Consequently, the rationale underlying the relevant evidence may reasonably be extended to situations in which Islam itself is under threat and access to the Imam or his representative is impossible, provided that the legitimacy of the armed struggle is otherwise established (Muḥaqqiq Ḥillī, 1944 AD/1364 AH: 1, 311).

Nevertheless, this extension would not encompass situations such as fighting ordinary bandits or highway robbers, since such encounters do not constitute *Jihād* or defense of the religion. Accordingly, a person killed under those circumstances remains subject to the ordinary requirements of ritual washing and shrouding.

4-2. The Combatant Must Die on the Battlefield

The second condition is that the combatant must die at the battlefield itself. The term "Battlefield" refers to a situation in which two opposing military forces are engaged, with injury and death occurring within that setting. Accordingly, if a combatant is wounded but subsequently removed from the battlefield and dies elsewhere, doubt arises as to whether the designation "*Qatīl fī al-Ma'rakah*" still applies. In "*Tadhkirat al-Fuqahā'*," Allamah Ḥillī reports a consensus among Imami

Among the traditions cited in support of this principle is the following narration:

Abū Khālīd narrated: "...Except for one who is killed between the two battle lines. If there remains any sign of life in him, he should be washed; otherwise, he should not be washed." (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 213)

If this narration were the sole evidence available, it would not be sufficient to establish the ruling, first because of weakness in its chain of transmission owing to *‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Dihqān* (Najāshī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 231), and second because its indication is not entirely unambiguous. However, additional traditions corroborating this principle will be presented below.

4-3. The Muslims Must Be Unable to Recover Him Before Death

The third condition concerns the time at which death occurs. Specifically, the combatant's soul must depart during the course of the battle itself, rather than before hostilities commence or after they have ended.

This condition is based on the observation that Muslims ordinarily gained access to the bodies of the slain only after the fighting had concluded, whereas during the battle itself they were generally unable to reach or attend to the wounded. Several of the traditions relied upon by the jurists concerning the battlefield martyr will now be examined.

1) *‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm* narrated from his father, from *Ḥammād*, from *Ḥarīz*, from *Ismā‘īl ibn Jābir* and *Zurārah*, from *Abū Ja‘far* (AS), who said: "I asked him: What is the ruling concerning the martyr...?" (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 211)

From the perspective of hadith *Rijāl*, the chain of transmission is authentic, since all of its transmitters have been declared trustworthy (Najāshī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 377, 260, 16, 142, 175; Ṭūsī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 161).

The narrator states: "I asked the Imam how a martyr should be treated. Is he buried in the condition in which he was killed, with his blood upon him? The Imam replied: Yes. He is buried in his bloodstained clothing. He is neither washed nor anointed with camphor; rather, he is buried in that state. The Imam then explained that the Messenger of God buried his uncle *Ḥamzah* in his bloodstained garments at the time of his martyrdom. A cloak was wrapped around him, although it was too short to cover his feet completely. The Prophet then requested fragrant vegetation and placed it over him. He also performed the funeral prayer over him and invoked blessings for him seventy times."

- 2) And narrated from *Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allāh*, from *Hārūn ibn Muslim*, from *Mas'adah ibn Ṣadaqah*, from *'Ammār*, from *Ja'far*, from his father (AS), that: "Ali (AS) did not wash *'Ammār ibn Yāsir*..." ((Ṭūsī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 1, 213)

In light of the preceding narration in "*al-Istibṣār*" and the generation of *Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī*, the omitted beginning of the chain is understood to refer back to *Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh* (Ṭūsī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 1, 213).

Upon close examination, the chain is reliable. Although *Mas'adah ibn Ṣadaqah* lacks an explicit individual declaration of reliability, several later scholars have accepted his narrations as reliable

(Shubayri Zanjani, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 180).

The narration states that Imam Ali (AS) did not wash *'Ammār ibn Yāsir* or *Hāshim al-Mirqāl*, but instead buried them in their own garments and did not perform the funeral prayer over them. The fact that they were not washed supports the legal ruling that ritual washing is waived for the battlefield martyr. Their burial in their ordinary clothing may likewise indicate that their garments replaced the customary burial shroud as a matter of legal concession and facilitation. The statement that no funeral prayer was performed, however, raises several interpretive possibilities: The narrator may simply have erred in transmitting this portion of the report; the text may have undergone scribal corruption, such that "Did not" originally read "Although." In that case, the intended meaning would be that although they were not shrouded, the funeral prayer was nevertheless performed.

It is possible that Imam Ali himself did not personally lead the prayer while another person performed it instead. This explanation, however, does not appear to accord with the historical sources and would require independent investigation (Ibn Sa'd, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 3, 198).

Shaykh Ṭūsī explains the narration on the basis of prudential dissimulation (Ṭūsī, 1945 AD/1365 AH: 6, 168). Under this interpretation, either the Imam did not order the funeral prayer because he was occupied with other matters, or someone else had already offered it and the Imam therefore saw no need to repeat it.

Finally, it is possible that the word "Prayer" in this context refers not

to the funeral prayer but to supplication, meaning only that no special invocation was made for them (Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 2, 508).

- 3) *Alī ibn Ibrāhīm* narrated from his father, from *Ibn Maḥbūb*, from *Ibn Sinān*, from *Abān ibn Taghlib*, who said: "I heard *Abū ‘Abd Allāh* (AS) say: "One who is killed in the path of God is buried in his own clothing..." (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 212) The chain of transmission is authentic, as all of its transmitters are recognized as trustworthy (Najāshī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 260, 16, 354, 214, 10). The narrator reports that Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) said: "A person killed in the path of God is buried in his own garments and is not washed, unless the Muslims reach him before he dies."

This clause admits two possible interpretations:

- That he is removed from the battlefield before dying; or
- That he survives until after the battle ends, even if he remains physically at the site of the fighting. In either case, the individual must be washed, shrouded, and anointed with camphor. The Imam further explained that the Messenger of God shrouded *Ḥamzah* in his own garments, did not wash him, but did perform the funeral prayer over him. From the foregoing discussion it becomes apparent that a person who is killed on the outskirts of the battlefield or outside the battlefield altogether must undergo ritual washing and shrouding, since such cases do not satisfy the conditions outlined above. Examples of these cases will be discussed in the following sections. One important question, however, appears to have been largely overlooked in the existing

literature: ‘Why are the obligations of ritual washing and shrouding waived for the battlefield martyr?’ ‘Does this legal exemption itself indicate a higher spiritual rank, or does it serve some other legal purpose?’ Answering this question would require a separate and detailed investigation beyond the scope of the present study.

5. Traditions Concerning "Virtuous Martyrs"

The principal focus of the present article, and one that has received comparatively little scholarly attention, is the body of traditions that may appropriately be designated as those concerning "Virtuous Martyrs." The traditions discussed in the following section likewise complement this category.

There is virtually no disagreement among Muslim scholars regarding the application of the title martyr to one who is killed on the battlefield or, under certain circumstances, on its periphery. The traditions considered here, however, concern situations in which no battle is involved at all. Rather, they describe individuals who die under various circumstances, yet are nevertheless referred to in the hadith literature as "Martyrs" or as "Having the status of a martyr." This raises two fundamental questions:

- Can the collected evidence of these traditions be taken to establish the legitimacy of applying the term martyr to persons other than those killed on the battlefield?
- Is it possible to identify a difference in spiritual rank between these categories of martyrs and those who are killed in battle?

The following traditions will be presented and analyzed with these questions in mind.

5-1. Being Killed While Defending a Just Right

A number of traditions regard being killed while seeking the restoration of one's lawful rights as constituting martyrdom, or at least as conferring the status of a martyr.

A) *Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā* narrated from *Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā*, from *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Najrān*, from *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān*, from *Abū ʿAbd Allāh* (AS), who said: "The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Whoever is killed while defending himself against injustice is a martyr." (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 5, 52)

Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) narrates that the Messenger of God declared: Whoever is killed while seeking redress for an injustice committed against him is indeed a martyr.

B) Through this same chain of transmission, from *Abū Maryam*, from *Abū Jaʿfar* (AS), who said: "The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Whoever is killed while defending himself against an injustice is a martyr." Then he said: "O! *Abū Maryam*, do you know what is meant while defending against an injustice?" I replied: "May I be your ransom. It refers to a person who is killed while defending his family, his property, or similar matters."

The Imam responded: "O! *Abū Maryam*, indeed, part of true jurisprudence is recognizing the truth." (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363

Abū Maryam narrates that Imam *Bāqir* (AS) reported the Messenger of God as saying: "Whoever is killed while seeking redress for an injustice is indeed a martyr. The Imam then asked *Abū Maryam* whether he understood the meaning of the expression while defending against an injustice. *Abū Maryam* answered that it referred to a person killed while defending his family, his wealth, or similar interests. The Imam replied: "O! *Abū Maryam*, part of jurisprudence is the recognition of what is truly right."

Commenting on this final statement, *Fayḍ Kāshānī* suggests that the Imam may have intended to describe the true jurist as one who possesses the discernment to distinguish between situations in which resistance and confrontation are justified and those in which conflict ought to be avoided (*Fayḍ Kāshānī*, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 15, 191-192).

C) From him, from *Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad*, from *‘Alī ibn al-Ḥakam*, from *al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī al-‘Alā’*, who said: "I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh (AS) about a man who fights in defense of his property. The Imam replied: "The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Whoever is killed while defending his property has the status of a martyr." (*Kulaynī*, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 5, 52)

The substance of this narration is essentially the same as that of the previous two traditions. One noteworthy difference, however, is that here the Prophet does not explicitly describe such a person as a martyr, but rather says that he possesses "The rank (or status) of a martyr." This wording indicates a distinction between this type of death and either martyrdom on the battlefield or being killed in the

path of God in the fullest sense (Muḥaqqiq Karakī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 365).

Another important point is that the narrator asks the Imam whether, under such circumstances, actively resisting the aggressor is preferable to refraining from confrontation. The Imam replies that were he personally in such a situation, he would prefer to avoid conflict.

This explicit statement may suggest that, in the Imam's view, this form of death carries a lesser spiritual reward than battlefield martyrdom. A possible explanation is that the individual sacrifices his life for the protection of worldly possessions or similar interests, whereas the battlefield martyr gives his life solely in the cause of God, seeking only His pleasure and the exaltation of the religion of Islam.

5-2. Death at a Particular Time or Place

Certain traditions regard dying at a particular time or place as constituting martyrdom or conferring martyr status.

Alī ibn Muḥammad, from *Sahl ibn Zīyād*, from *Ibn Abī Naṣr*, from *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā* (AS), who said: "The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Indeed, Friday is the master of all days...Whoever dies during its day or night dies as a martyr." (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 3, 414)

The chain of transmission is authentic, and the narration indicates that a person who dies on Friday is regarded as having died a martyr. This distinction, however, is understood as arising from the special virtue associated with certain sacred times and places, and it pertains only to believers. It cannot reasonably be extended to an individual

68 steeped in sin or openly hostile to God, for whom death at such a

blessed time would not in itself constitute a divine favor or spiritual achievement.

5-3. The Death of a Believer

Some traditions describe the death of a believer itself as martyrdom.

A) The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Whoever dies while loving the Family of Muḥammad dies a martyr." (Tabari Amoli, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 197) This tradition is widely known and has been transmitted in numerous Shi'i and Sunni sources (Irbilī, 1961 AD/1381 AH: 1, 107; Ṭabarī, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 197; Tha'labī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 8, 314). Nevertheless, when evaluated solely on the basis of its chain of transmission, it is considered weak.

B) From *Abū Ja'far* (AS): "Every believer is a martyr, even if he dies in his bed." (Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 676) This narration possesses an authentic chain of transmission. Its wording clearly indicates that even a believer who dies peacefully in bed is regarded as a martyr. The tradition further likens such a death to dying among the army of the Imam *Mahdī* (AJ).

5-4. Death Following the Performance of Righteous Deeds

Some traditions regard death following the performance of certain righteous acts as constituting martyrdom.

a. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever dies after making a righteous testament dies a martyr." (Rāwandī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 231; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 100, 200) This narration is *Mursal* (its chain is incomplete). It refers to a person who departs this life after

leaving behind a righteous final testament, indicating metaphorically that such an individual receives the reward and recompense of a martyr.

- b. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever says every morning: "I seek refuge in God, the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing, from Satan, the accursed," and then recites the last three verses of Surah *al-Hashr*, God appoints seven thousand angels to guard him and invoke blessings upon him until nightfall. If he dies on that day, he dies a martyr." (Shu'ayrī, n.d.: 48) This tradition presents another instance in which martyrdom is attributed not to death in battle but to perseverance in a particular devotional practice. The designation of such a person as a martyr therefore appears to emphasize the extraordinary spiritual reward attached to this act of worship rather than to indicate the application of the legal rulings specific to one killed in battle. The narration is *Mursal*. Nevertheless, it states that whoever recites the last three verses of Surah *al-Hashr* and dies on that day will receive the reward of a martyr. In interpreting this category of traditions, two possible understandings may be proposed. The first possibility is that the application of the title martyr to these individuals is figurative or analogical. According to this interpretation, they are not martyrs in the literal sense but are likened to martyrs in terms of their reward and spiritual rank. This understanding finds support in traditions employing expressions such as:

"Whoever is killed while defending his property has the status of a martyr." The second possibility is that the word martyr, as used in

the hadith literature, has undergone a genuine semantic expansion, extending beyond the battlefield martyr to include the categories described above. Determining which of these two interpretations is preferable requires examining a third group of traditions.

6. Traditions Demonstrating the Expanded Usage of Martyr

After examining the various categories of martyrs, including the battlefield martyr, the martyr who dies outside the immediate battlefield, and those described above as "Virtuous Martyrs," an important question remains: "Are these traditions merely intended to place certain deceased believers in the same category as martyrs with respect to their heavenly reward, or are they actually expanding and defining the concept of martyrdom itself?"

A contextual analysis of these traditions suggests that their principal purpose is to explain and broaden the meaning of the term martyr rather than simply to equate certain deceased individuals with martyrs in terms of reward.

This interpretation is reinforced by another group of traditions indicating that, within the language of the hadith literature, martyrdom is not confined exclusively to those killed on the battlefield. Rather, under certain circumstances other than death in combat, a person may also attain a degree of martyrdom.

1) *Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khālid al-Barqī* narrated from his father, from *Ḥamzah ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Jaʿfarī*, from *Jamīl ibn Darrāj*, from *ʿAmr ibn Marwān*, from *al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥaṣīrah*, from *Zayd ibn Arqam*, from *al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī* (AS), who said... (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 1, 163).

Imam *Husayn* (AS) said: "There is no Shi'i except that he is both truthful and a martyr. The narrator asked: "May I be your ransom! How can this be, when most Shi'is die in their beds? The Imam replied: "Have you not read the Book of God in Surah *al-Ḥadīd*: "Those who believe in God and His messengers, they are the truthful ones and the martyrs in the sight of their Lord." The narrator says: "It was as though I had never noticed this verse before." The Imam then continued: "If martyrdom were limited to what you imagine it to be, then the number of martyrs would indeed be very small."

2) Imam Ali (AS) narrated from the Messenger of God (PBUH), in a report concerning the Prophet's visit to *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah* during his illness... (Ibn Ḥayyūn, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 1, 226).

Imam Ali relates that while the Prophet was visiting *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah* during his final illness, someone expressed surprise that *ʿAbd Allāh* had not attained martyrdom but was instead dying in his bed. The Messenger of God asked: "Whom among my community do you regard as a martyr?" They replied: "Is a martyr anyone other than one who is killed in the path of God while advancing against the enemy without turning his back?" The Prophet answered: "If that were so, the martyrs of my community would indeed be very few." He then explained: "A martyr is not only the person you have described, but also one who dies from plague, one who dies from severe intestinal illness, one who dies beneath a collapsed structure, one who drowns, and a woman who dies during childbirth." They asked: "O! Messenger of God, what does it mean for a woman to die in childbirth?" He replied: "It refers to a woman whose child

becomes lodged in her womb, resulting in her death."

3) From him, from his father, from *al-Naḍr ibn Suwayd*, from *Yahyā ibn Imrān al-Ḥalabī*, from *Ibn Muskān*, from *Abū Baṣīr*, from *Abū Abd Allāh* (AS), who said: "The Imam said to me: "O! *Abū Muḥammad*, whoever among you dies while adhering to this cause is a martyr." I asked: "Even if he dies in his bed?" He replied: "Yes, by God, even if he dies in his bed. He is alive with his Lord and is provided for." (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 1, 164) Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) tells *Abū Baṣīr*: "O! *Abū Muḥammad*, whoever among you dies while remaining steadfast upon this faith is a martyr." *Abū Baṣīr* asked whether this also applied to someone who died peacefully in bed. The Imam replied: "Yes, by God. Even if he dies in his bed, he is alive with his Lord and receives His provision."

The first narration is weak in terms of transmission because *Ḥamzah ibn Abd Allāh* is an unknown narrator. His name does not appear in the standard biographical works, and this is the only narration in which he transmits from *Jamīl ibn Darrāj* (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 2, 68).

The second narration, found in "*Daʿāʾim al-Islām*," is likewise *Mursal*, since its complete chain of transmission is not provided (Ibn Ḥayyūn, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 1, 226).

The third narration, however, is authentic. Every transmitter in its chain has been declared reliable, and the same report also appears in *al-Kāfī* (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 8, 146; Najāshī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 76, 427, 230, 214, 441; Ṭūsī, 2006 AD/1427 AH: 363).

Moreover, the substance of the first two narrations is corroborated

by numerous other textual evidences, which, for the sake of brevity, will not be reproduced here. Various explanations have been proposed as to why the ordinary death of a believer is described as martyrdom.

One interpretation is that the believer is constantly prepared for death, just as the battlefield martyr enters combat fully aware of the possibility of being killed and with complete presence of heart and spiritual readiness.

Another explanation is that the believer continually awaits the uprising of Imam Mahdi (AJ) and hopes to attain martyrdom while fighting alongside him. According to this understanding, one who sincerely desires and is content with participating in a righteous cause is regarded as sharing in that cause, even if circumstances prevent its actual realization (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 5, 803).

7. The Degrees of Martyrdom According to the Traditions

From the body of traditions examined above, a new classification of martyrdom may be inferred. According to this analysis, the highest degree of martyrdom belongs to those who are killed in the path of God, whether on the battlefield itself or outside its immediate confines. The Qur'an's emphasis on the word "Killing" and the traditions' repeated use of the term "One who is killed" may indicate the superior spiritual rank of those who shed their blood for the sake of God.

The second rank may be assigned to those designated as martyrs who were not killed in battle.

74 An important point to emphasize here is that, although the

battlefield martyr differs from one killed outside the battlefield with respect to certain legal rulings, such as exemption from ritual washing and shrouding, this distinction does not necessarily imply a higher degree of martyrdom. Rather, the battlefield martyr is subject to different legal rulings due to the unique circumstances of his death.

Several considerations support treating those killed outside the battlefield on an equal footing with those killed in battle.

First, both categories share the common characteristic of being killed, unlike those who merely receive the designation or reward of a martyr while dying natural deaths.

Second, Islamic history contains numerous eminent figures who were killed outside the battlefield, and there is little basis for denying that their spiritual rank is at least equal to, and perhaps even greater than, that of those killed in battle. Admittedly, there may also be exceptional cases in which a person dies a natural death yet receives a reward equivalent to that of one who was killed in the path of God. At the same time, it should not be assumed that every instance of being killed automatically confers martyrdom. The traditions concerning one who is killed while defending himself against injustice contain an implicit warning against losing one's life in pursuit of purely worldly objectives. Furthermore, a number of the traditions that speak of the reward of martyrdom or expand the concept of martyrdom employ expressions of comparison rather than identity, such as: "...He is like one who was killed beneath the banner of *Qā'im*." (Astarabadi, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 640)

On the basis of the traditions analyzed in this study, two elements

appear to play a decisive role in determining an individual's place within the hierarchy of martyrdom: "The manner of death, and the person's intention and purpose." Moreover, the concept of being killed is not restricted to warfare. Both the hadith literature and Islamic history contain numerous examples of individuals who were killed outside formal military conflict, several of which have been discussed above.

Conclusion

This study set out to clarify the conceptual scope of the term martyr in the Islamic hadith literature and to analyze the distinction between virtuous martyrs and those killed in battle. The principal findings may be summarized as follows:

1. The semantic expansion of martyrdom in the hadith literature. While the Noble Qur'an predominantly employs the vocabulary of being killed when referring to those who die in the path of God, the hadith literature extends the concept of martyrdom to numerous additional categories. This semantic expansion demonstrates that applying the title martyr to individuals outside the context of direct military combat is firmly rooted in the Islamic textual tradition and cannot be regarded as an unwarranted innovation.
2. The distinction between the spiritual ranks of martyrs. The findings indicate that although the title martyr is applied to all of the categories mentioned in the traditions, those who shed their blood in pursuit of divine objectives occupy a higher spiritual station. Their superiority derives not merely from participation in battle but from the sacrifice of their blood in the cause of God.

3. The principal criterion for classifying martyrs. The analysis suggests that being killed in the path of God should be regarded as the primary criterion in classifying the various forms of martyrdom. This criterion encompasses both those killed on the battlefield and those killed outside it, while distinguishing both groups from the virtuous martyrs, who die natural deaths yet are described as martyrs because of their faith, deeds, or exceptional spiritual merit. These findings have significant implications for a renewed understanding of the jurisprudential concept of martyrdom, for a more precise delineation of the various spiritual degrees of martyrs, and for a more comprehensive appreciation of the exalted status of the martyr within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Finally, although the precise determination of the spiritual ranks of martyrs ultimately belongs to God's exclusive knowledge, the evidence of the hadith literature provides sufficient grounds for affirming that different categories of martyrs occupy different degrees of spiritual excellence, even though all are included, in one sense or another, under the honorific title of martyr. Below is an academic English translation of the bibliography. Arabic titles have been transliterated, while Persian article titles have been translated into English. Standard scholarly transliteration has been used where appropriate.

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