

The term Qasida describes classical Arabic poetry. The classical form of a Qasida maintains a single elaborate meter throughout, and every line rhymes. Poetry has long been essential to Arab society. It was used to defend the honour of tribes from the verbal attacks of others, as well as to praise those whom the Arabs revered. It was a method for spreading one's message and leaving a mark in society.

During the time of Prophet Muhammad^(saw) there were at least two companions who stood out in their roles and responsibilities of reciting Qasidas for the Muslims. It was poetry both defending Islam from insults or hateful words and praising the merits and beauty of Islam, the Messenger^(saw), and Allah. They were our masters Hassan son of Thabit and Ka'ab son of Zuhair, may god be pleased with them.

The famous name of "Al-Burda" (the Cloak) comes from the first Qasida our master Ka'ab bin Zuhair recited as a Muslim. Earlier, while in the company of the Mushriks (polytheists), Ka'ab was a powerful reciter of propaganda and harmful Qasidas against the Muslims. Upon accepting the oneness of God and the Prophet Muhammad^(saw) as the Messenger of God, Sayidna Ka'ab wanted to meet the Beloved Prophet of Allah^(saw) despite the mandate against Ka'ab's own life. Following the advice of his Muslim brother, Sayidna Ka'ab, dressed in a concealing and unrecognizable manner, attended the Fajr prayer in the Mosque of the Prophet (masjid-ul nabawi). Afterwards, Sayidna Ka'ab came in front of the messenger of Allah^(saw) and began reciting a Qasida praising the messenger^(saw) and seeking his forgiveness. After hearing the poem, our delighted Prophet^(saw) removed his own cloak and placed it over the shoulders of Sayidna Ka'ab as a gift.

This is not the only Qasida to receive the name of Al-burdah. Roughly seven hundred years after the death of the prophet^(saw), the great poet and scholar Imam Sharaf ad-din al Busiri composed a Qasida to later receive the same name. After an illness that left him paralysed in half of his body, Imam al-Busiri (may Allah have mercy on him) composed a poem in which he expresses his love for the prophet, praises him and supplicates to God seeking intercession through. Afterwards, during a dream, Imam Al-Busiri saw the beloved messenger^(saw). In the Islamic tradition, a vision of the magnitude of seeing the prophet^(saw) is without a doubt considered to be a true vision. In his vision, Imam Al-Busiri recited his Qasida to the Prophet^(saw), after which the prophet^(saw) placed his cloak over Imam Al-Busiri. When Imam Al-Busiri awoke, he found himself cured from his paralysis. News of the experience spread and this Qasida also became known as Qasida-tul-Burda and became and still is frequently recited all over the world.

The following excerpts are from the Qasida-tul-Burda of Sayidna Ka'ab bin Zuhair:

قصيدة البردة - كعب ابن زهير

Qasida Burda by Ka'b Ibn Zuhair

(translated by Imam Fode Drame of Zawayah Foundation - www.zawayah.ca)

نُبِّئْتُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَوْعَدَنِي

1. Nubbitu anna Rasulallahi aw'adani

I have been informed that the messenger of Allah^(saw) has warned (me)

وَالْعَفْوُ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ مَأْمُولٌ

wal 'afwu 'inda rasulillahi maamool

yet pardon from the messenger of Allah^(saw) is expected (hoped for)

مَهْلًا هَذَا الَّذِي أَعْطَاكَ نَافِلَةَ الْقُرْ—

2. Mahlan hadaakalladhi a' taaka nafilatal qur

Gently (tarry) you have been well-guided by the one who gave you

رءَانَ فِيهَا مَوَاعِظٌ وَتَفْصِيلٌ

Rana fihaa mawa'eedhu wa tafseel

the gift of Quran wherein are words of good counsel and clear guidelines

لَا تَأْخُذْنِي بِأَقْوَالِ الْوُشَاةِ وَلَمْ

3. La taa'khu dhanni Bi aqwaalil wushaati walam

Don't hold against me the words of the detractors

أَذْنِبَ وَلَوْ كَثُرَتْ فِي الْأَقَاوِيلُ

Adh nab wa law kathurat fiyal aqaweel

I have not offended in spite of the many rumours

لَقَدْ أَقَوْمٌ مَقَامًا لَوْ يَقُومُ بِهِ

4. Laqad aqoomu maqaman law yaqumu bihi
I stand in a position were to stand there

أَرَىٰ وَ أَسْمَعُ مَا لَوْ يَسْمَعُ الْفِيلُ

Ara wa asma 'u ma lauw yasma 'ul feel
the elephant seeing what I see and hearing what I hear

لَظَلَّ يَرْعَدُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ

5. Ladhalla yar 'a du illa ayakunalahu
(if) would be all in tremor, unless it receives

مِنَ الرَّسُولِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ تَنْوِيلٌ

Min ar-rasooli bi idhni llahi tanweel
A largesse from the messenger ^(saw) by God's permission

حَتَّىٰ وَضَعْتُ يَمِينِي مَا أَنَا زِعْمُهُ

6. Hatta wada' tu yamini ma una zi 'u hu
Till I put my right hand with total resignation

فِي كَفِّ ذِي تَقِمَاتٍ قِيلُهُ الْقِيلُ

Fikafi dhi naqi matin qiluhul qeel
In the hand of the awe-striking one whose word is final

فَالَهُوَ أَخْوَفُ عِنْدِي إِذْ أَكَلِمَتِهِ

7. Falahuwa akhwaf 'indi idh ukallimuhu
He inspires me with greater awe whilst I address him

وَ قِيلَ أَلَيْكَ مَنَسُوبٌ وَ مَسْئُولٌ

Wa qeela innaka mansoobun wa mas ool
When they say that you are referred to be cross-examined

مِنْ ضَيْعِمٍ بِضُرَاءِ الْأَرْضِ مَخْدَرُهُ

8. Min day ghamin bi darraa-il ardhi makhdaruhu
More than a lion whose den is in the thicket of the land

فِي بَطْنِ عَثْرٍ غَيْلٌ دُونَهُ غَيْلٌ

Fi batni 'athara ghilun dunahu gheel
In the valley of 'athar a jungle behind a jungle

يَعْدُو فَيَلْحَمُ ضَرْغَامِينَ عَيْشُهُمَا

9. Yaghdoo fayalham darghameini 'ayshuhuma
Sets out in the morning and feeds with meat, two cubs

لَحْمٍ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَعْفُورٌ خَرَادِيلٌ

Lahmun minannaasi ma' foorun kharadeel
From the flesh of humans shredded and dust-ridden

إِذَا يُسَاوِرُ قِرْنًا لَا يَحِلُّ لَهُ

10. Idha yusaweru qirnan la yahillu lahu
If he challenges a rival it never comes to pass

أَنْ يَتْرِكَ الْقِرْنَ إِلَّا وَهُوَ مَعْلُولٌ

An yat rukal qirna illa wahuwa maghlool
That he would leave the opponent except in chains (fetters)

مِنْهُ تَظَلُّ سِبَاعُ الْجَوِّ نَافِرَةٌ

11. minhu ta dhallu siba' ul jawi naafiratan
From him the wild-animals of the air fly away

وَلَا تَمْشَى بِوَادِيهِ الْأَرَاجِيلُ

Wala tamashsha bi wa dihil arajeel
And foot-walkers never walk about in his valley.

وَلَا يَرَالُ بِوَادِيهِ أَخْوِثَةٌ

12. wala yazaalu bi waadihi akhu thiqatin
How often the stout-hearted individual lay in his valley

مُضْرَجُ الْبُرِّ وَالذَّرْسَانُ مَا كُولُ

Mudarrajulbazzi wad-dirsanu maakool
His shirt smeared with blood and his threadbare dress eaten up

إِنَّ الرَّسُولَ لَنُورٌ يُسْتَضَاءُ بِهِ

13. innar-rasoola lanoorun yustadaa 'u bihi
Indeed the messenger is a light from which enlightenment is received

مُهَيَّئِدٌ مِنْ سَيْوْفِ اللَّهِ مَسْلُودٌ

Muhannadun min suyufillahi maslool
the unsheathed sword of God of the fine Indian make.