

Realities Reemphasized

By: Seyyed Ali Shahbaz

On the threshold of the auspicious 1st of Rajab, I intend to 'copy-paste' (reproduce) here from the celebrated scholar Sheikh Mufid's famous work Kitab al-Irshad (Book of Guidance – written over a millennium years ago), the following narration by Jaber ibn Abdullah al-Ansari, the venerable companion of Prophet Muhammad (SAWA): "The Prophet of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, said to me: It will happen that you will live until you meet one of my children descended from al-Husain (AS), called Muhammad (AS), who will split wide open knowledge (Baqer al-Uloom) of religion. When you meet him, recite my greeting to him."

Perhaps, some might think I am merely repeating an often heard hadith mentioned in other authoritative books as well. They are right.

I am not a coiner of hadith to attribute to the Prophet what he did not say – as was the case with the 'factories' that had cropped up during the 44-year rule of Mu'awiyah (half as governor of Syria and half as the usurper caliph) to produce 'brand new hadith' by paying certain pseudo-companions of the Prophet handsome sums of money or inventing companions by names when none such existed.

At any rate, repetition of facts and re-emphasizing of realities, especially those concerning the fundamentals of faith and the ultimate truth is not a crime, or for that matter, a sin. Otherwise, neither God would have repeated certain terms over and over again in the holy Qur'an to lay stress, nor would the Prophet had emphasized so ardently in many a hadith the prime position of his Ahl al-Bayt, at whose doorstep – the threshold of his daughter Fatema (SA) – he repeated for six consecutive months, every morning at the time of the dawn prayer (as testified by our Sunni brethren), the Verse of Purity, following its revelation.

"Allah desires to keep away uncleanness from you Ahl al-Bayt and preserve you thoroughly purified." (33:33)

Jaber lived up to a ripe old age, memorizing with computer-like precision the prophetic words of the Last Prophet – perhaps by repeating them frequently. Over half-a-century later, as the Prophet's progeny multiplied and was slaughtered as well in Karbala by murderers masquerading as Muslims, he finally encountered in Medina, for the first time, a boy of the Prophet's lineal descent named after the Prophet.

Needless to say, Jaber dutifully conveyed to the lad the Prophet's greetings and recognized him as the 5th Imam of the Ahl al-Bayt.

Born in Medina on the 1st of Rajab in 57 AH, 46 years after the departure from the mortal world of the grandfather (Prophet) of his both grandfathers (Imam Husain and Imam Hasan – paternal and maternal respectively), Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS) was martyred 57 years later in 114 AH at the age of 57 years.

His period of Imamate was 19 years, during which he earned lasting fame as Baqer al-Uloom (Splitter and Spreader of Sciences), as the Prophet had predicted.

In those days of the ungodly rule of the Omayyad usurpers, when caliphs like Walid tore and targeted with arrows the holy Qur'an (the Terry Jones of the Arabs, as the sacrilegious Saudis continue to do in Bahrain while desecrating mosques), the 5th Imam strove to enlighten Muslims with the genuine precepts of God's Final Revelation to mankind.

He used to explain the correct meaning of the ayahs of the heavenly scripture at a time when the pseudo scholars of the era used to twist and distort the meanings of God's Words, either to please the debauched rulers, or out of gross ignorance of the Prophet's pristine teachings that made them indulge in qiyas or guesswork.

The 5th Imam, braving oppression and even a second bout of imprisonment in Damascus – the first was as a 4-year boy in the aftermath of the tragedy of Karbala along with his parents, Imam Zain al-Abedin (AS) and Hazrat Fatema bint Hasan (SA) – brought about an academic revolution that was to flower and bear fruit in the days of his son and successor, Imam Ja'far as-Sadeq (AS).

Since time and space do not allow me to repeat other outstanding events of Imam Baqer's (AS) glorious life, like the setting up of the first ever mint in Islamic history to prevent the draining of the bullion to the Byzantines, or the debate with the chief Christian priest of Syria that made him and his flock embrace the truth of Islam, I end this brief column by 'copy-pasting' (reproducing) the following passage from Sheikh Mufid's al-Irshad: "Abu Ja'far (Imam Baqer), peace be on him, recounted reports of the beginnings of history (mubtada) and reports of the prophets. Stories of the campaigns of the Prophet (maghazi) were written on his authority.

(Men) followed the practices of the Prophet (sunan) on his authority and relied on him with

regard to the rites of the pilgrimage which he reported on the authority of the Prophet of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family. They (also) wrote a commentary of the Qur'an on his authority. Both the Shia (khassa) and the non-Shia (amma) report traditions on his authority. He debated with the exponents of individual reasoning (ahl al-ara) and the people learnt a great deal of theology (ilm al-kalam) from him.