

## The Initiator of Sciences

On the first day of the lunar month of Rajab, 57A.H. the pure prophetic house was swept with waves of joy and delight at the birth of Muhammad bin Ali bin Husayn (A.S.).

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A.S.) lived more than three years under the care of Imam Husayn(A.S.), his grandfather. He witnessed, whilst a child, the tragedy of Taff during which Imam Husayn(A.S.), most of his family, and his followers were martyred at Karbala'. Throughout the years of his father's Imam, he was imbued with the essence of the Message and the Imam. During that period, he imbibed Islamic doctrine and the knowledge of the Prophets (A.S.).

So Imam al-Baqir (A.S.) was the zenith, in his lineage, thought, and morals, which qualified him to be the ideological and social authority after his holy father Imam Sajjad (A.S.).

The name and nickname of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) were given in advance by his great, great grandfather, the Holy Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). The revered companion of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.), Jabir bin Abdulla Ansari, is reported to have said. "The Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) said to me, You may live long enough to see a son of mine from the loins of Husayn (A.S.), called Muhammad. He will certainly 'cut through' the science of religion. Should you see him, convey my greeting to him."

That is why Fifth Holy Muhammad bin Ali (A.S.) was called "al-Baqir", which means 'the man who is deeply knowledgeable and sharply wise, who discovers knowledge's innermost mysteries and essence, and who is well-versed in its arts', as weighty Arabic dictionaries explain.

### Status of the Imam:

The exalted position in thought and action of the Holy Imam (A.S.), combined with the leadership qualifications he possessed as a direct outcome of the carefully planned education given to him by Imam Ali ibn Husayn al-Sajjad (A.S.), his father, made all alike agree that he was no ordinary person, but one who enjoyed a unique stature among the people. The following statements concerning the Holy Imam (A.S.) were made by various, prominent, Muslim personalities belonging to different schools of thought:

1. Abdulla bin Ata' Makki is reported to have said, "Never have I seen scholars so limited in knowledge in the presence of a scholar like Muhammad bin Ali al-Baqir(A.S.)."
2. Ibn Imad Hanbali said, "Abu-Ja'far Muhammad al-Baqir(A.S.) was one of the 'fuqaha" of Madinah. He was given the title of al-Baqir because he ripped open knowledge, knew its fine subtleties and expanded it..."
3. Muhammad bin Talha Shafi'i is reported to have said that, "Muhammad bin Ali al-Baqir(A.S.) was the one who cut through knowledge, collected and disseminated it. He raised it many degrees, outwitted others in exploring it, imbibed it and decorated it with gems of thought. His heart was serene, his good deeds ever-growing, his soul chaste, and his morals noble.

He would fill his time with deeds in obedience to Allah. His piety was unshakably firm. One could clearly see in him the signs of closeness to Allah, and the purity of the divine choice. Virtues hastened to him, and good qualities were honoured by him."

6. When reporting from him, Jabir bin Yazid Ju'fi would say, "The trustee of trustees, the inheritor of the knowledge of the prophets, Muhammad bin Ali bin Husayn (A.S.), told me..."

### Features of the Imam's Noble Character:

1. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (A.S.) is reported to have said, "My father used to praise Allah much. When I walked with him he would remember Allah; when I ate with him, he would remember Allah. Even when talking to people, he would remember Allah. I heard him always praising Allah and saying repeatedly: 'There is no god but Allah'. He would gather us together and order us to praise Allah till sunrise. Whoever was able from among us, my father would order him to recite the Holy Qur'an, but he would order the one who could not read to praise Allah."

2. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (A.S.) said:

"One day, I called on my father and found him busy handing out eight thousand dinars to the poor people of Madinah. He set free a family of eleven slaves."

3. Hassan bin Kuthayr said, "I once complained to Abu-Ja'far Muhammad bin Ali (A.S.) about my poverty and how my friends had abandoned me. 'How bad is the brother who cares for you when you are wealthy and abandons you when you are poor,' commented he.

Then he beckoned to his servant who brought a bag in which there were seven hundred dirhams. 'Spend this', he said to me,' and when it runs out, notify me,"

#### 4. Sulaiman bin Qarm said,

"Abu-Ja'far Muhammad bin Ali (A.S.) would reward us with five hundred, six hundred and up to one thousand dirhams. He never tired of helping his brethren, those who came from distant places to see him, and those who hoped he would help them."

Though his financial resources were limited he shouldered his social responsibility adequately. He was as his son Imam al-Sadiq (A.S.) described him, "My father had the least amount of money at his disposal compared with the rest of the members of his family, but his financial burden was the heaviest."

#### **The Reform March:**

He adopted an open policy, and was known to be a just ruler of fair judgement.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A.S.) benefitted from the political situation and worked hard to complete the great educational project initiated by his father. He provided the reform movement with more cadres through his unceasing educational efforts at the highest levels. That is why so many people, of different educational backgrounds, used to visit him, coming from various parts of the Muslim world. Famous scholars from various parts of Mu'tazila, Sufis, Kharijites (one-time followers of Imam Ali (a.s.) who later broke with him and fought against him) and others, used to call on him, either to discuss with him certain religious matters or to benefit from his knowledge.

The school of Ahlul-Bayt (A.S.) was characterized by the diversity of its sciences.

#### **First: School of Diverse Sciences**

Sheikh Mufid said:

"Hardly did a son of Hasan and Husayn (A.S.) shown such knowledge of the faith, sciences of Sunnah and the Holy Qur'an, the life of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and arts of literature, as did Abu-Ja'far al-Baqir (A.S.)"

"Abu-Ja'far narrated the histories of the prophets and wrote about the wars of the Holy Prophet(S.A.W.). Through him, Muslims were acquainted with the practices of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). On him they relied in performing the rites of hajj which he related from the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.). From him they took and wrote down the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an. Both scholars and common people reported from him. He argued with whoever disagreed with him from the heads of the various schools of thought. People learnt much, through him, of the basic tenets of Islam."

Describing his sublime horizons of knowledge, his disciple Muhammad bin Muslim says, "Nothing flashed into my mind which seemed hard to understand without my asking Abu-Ja'far (al-Baqir) (A.S.) about it. I put thirty thousand questions to him."

The thought of Imam al-Baqir is derived from the divine Message. It is comprehensive, covering all fields of knowledge including philosophy, jurisprudence, and Islamic history.

Not only were the contents of the Imam's thought broad and diverse, but also he sought different ways to communicate it to the 'ummah'. He might hold an educational class, in which he lectured to his disciples or those seeking knowledge. Sometimes he would hold Islamic debates with individuals. Other times, when the chance offered itself, he would disseminate his thought in mass meetings such as the hajj at Mecca. His sayings, speeches, conversations and discourses conveyed his thought.

#### **Second: Comprehensiveness of Imam al-Baqir's School:**

A thorough examination of the books written on the life of Imam al-Baqir (A.S.) presents us with a long list of top intellectuals who shone like stars in the sky of Islamic civilization, all of whom had drunk from the gushing spring of the school of the Holy Imam(A.S.).

"The remnants of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), the leading men among the post-Prophet era Muslims, and the great Muslim jurists, reported from Imam al-Baqir's teachings of the faith. On account of his virtue, he became a beacon among the virtuous. He became proverbial."

His house in Madinah served as a centre of guidance, a beacon by which hearts clearly saw the path of virtue, and towards which eyes were turned to acquire knowledge and to be led in the best way towards Allah.

#### **Umayyad's Policy During Imam al-Baqir's Time:**

In the year 95 A.H. Imam al-Sajjad(A.S.) was assassinated. His son, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir(A.S.) patiently shouldered the responsibility of Imamate. His term of Imamate lasted 19 years, two years of which were under the rule of Walid bin Abdul-Malik, and two other years were under the rule of Sulaiman bin Abdul-Malik, the Umayyad ruler who assumed power for only two years.

When Umar bin Abdul-Aziz ascended to power a great change was brought about into the advantage of Islam. Though his term was short, his position towards Ahlul-Bait was on the whole, fair. He reversed many of the injustices of cursing Imam Ali (A.S.) on the pulpits of the mosque, which was first introduced by Mu'awiya, and remained an obligatory practice, not only in the capital, but, all over the Islamic state, and kept as part of the Friday address by the Umayyad rulers, was actually stopped by Umar bin Abdul- Aziz.

Umar bin Abdul- Aziz restored Fadak to Imam al-Baqir (A.S.), considering its confiscation by the previous Umayyad rulers as unjustifiable.

As the Umayyads were not used to peace between Ahlul-Bayt (A.S.) and the Umayyad authorities, they began to put pressure on Umar bin Abdul-Aziz for his moderate Policy.

Umar bin Abdul-Aziz remained in power for only two years and five months. After him, Yazid bin Abdul-Malik, historically known for his adultery, debauchery and obscene poetry, took over. But, if Yazid could not find time, due to his indulgence in his pleasures, to block the Islamic march led by Imam al-Baqir (A.S.), his successor, Hisham bin Abdul-Malik, adamantly fought the Islamic movement. Rough mannered, miserly, coarse, and hating non-Arab Muslims, he raised the taxes imposed on them. He revived the bloody days of Yazid bin Muawiyah and Hajjaj bin Yusuf. Ahlul-Bayt(A.S.) did not stand idly by.

Zaid bin Ali(A.S.) a brother of Imam al-Baqir(A.S.), led an uprising, which was an echo of that of Imam Husayn (A.S.), against the tyrants. He attained martyrdom, along with all his followers at Kufah in Iraq. Hisham ordered his body to be crucified, burnt, and its ashes be scattered in the river Euphrates.

But Umayyad tyranny did not stop at killing Zaid and his true-believing companions. The next targets were the key joints of the Islamic movement led by Imam al-Baqir(A.S.) and his disciples.

Hisham, the Umayyad ruler, decided to get rid of Jabir bin Yazid Ju'afi, the best of the Imam's students.

But the Holy Imam (A.S.) failed the plot by ordering Jabir to fake madness as the only way to escape death. There was no better choice than this facing the Imam.

The reader can imagine the scope of the injustices done to the followers of the divine Message, and the atmosphere of terror created by the Umayyads at that time. Otherwise why should a man, known for his knowledge and virtues, pretend madness, risk being insulted by children, and bring himself to play with them?

A few days later the governor of Kufah wrote a letter to Hisham about Jabir Ju'fi saying: "He was a man of knowledge and virtue, but he has gone out of his mind. Right now he is riding his stick, playing in the city square with the boys, and thus, Jabir was rescued from being killed.

Nevertheless, Hisham held the conviction that the sole source of sound Islamic awareness was Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A.S.). He was convinced that leaving the Holy Imam(A.S.) alone would mean giving him more time to enhance the reform movement and make it firm and steadfast.

The Umayyad plot directed towards preventing the Imam (A.S.) from working on behalf of the 'ummah' and the message and arresting him and deporting him from Madinah, the capital of his great great grandfather Muhammad (S.A.W.), which, along with Hijaz, revered the Holy Imam(A.S.) and sympathized with him.

To Damascus the Holy Imam(A.S.) and his son Ja'far al-Sadiq (A.S.) were taken, where they were thrown behind bars to cut off their communication with the 'ummah'.

But even there, the Imam (A.S.) impressed all those who came his way. Shortly afterwards the Imam (A.S.) was set free. Abu-Bakr Hadrami offers this explanation:

In the point Hisham ordered him be imprisoned. At prison the Imam(A.S.) preached to the prisoners. All of them gathered around him and listened eagerly to what he had to say. The jailer went to Hisham and told him what was going on. And, so, Hisham ordered that the Imam(A.S.) along with his followers to be returned to Madinah."

While Hadrami insists that the Imam (A.S.) was released from the Umayyad prison because of the positive effect he had on the prisoners, Muhammad bin Jarir Tabari, in his book 'Dala'il Imamah' (Proof of Imamah) maintains that he was set free because of his influence over the people of Damascus. The Imam(A.S.) had a prolonged argument with the head of Christians in the city. Imam(A.S.) refuted their opinions and disclosed their falseness, and explained all the doubts raised by some people about Islam.

Yet there is no real contradiction between the two stories, as the Imam (A.S.) would declare the right wherever he was, free or shackled, as long as there was someone who would listen without prejudice.

There was no alternative but to physically eliminate the Imam(A.S.). That was the final decision of the Umayyad authorities. Whatever the Umayyads had done had not achieved

**the prime objective which was to put an end to the Holy Imam's activities.**

**The Imam was martyred by poisoning on the seventh day of the month of Zee al-Hajjah in the year 114 Hijrah in the holy city of Madinah.**

**He departed to meet his Lord patient and seeking Allah's pleasure and reward.**

**Peace be upon him on the day he was born, on the day he died, and on the day when he shall be raised to life.**