

Imam Muhammad Baqer (A.S.), Immortal Reigns His Name

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“I admonish you regarding five things; if you are wronged, do not commit wrongdoing to others, if you are betrayed, do not betray anyone, if you are called a liar, do not be furious, if you are praised, do not be jubilant, if you are criticised do not fret and think of what is said in criticism, if you find in yourself what is criticised about you, then you are falling down in the eyes of God; when you are furious about the truth, it is much greater calamity than your falling down in the eyes of the people. And if you are opposite of what is said (in criticism) about you, then it is a merit you acquired without having to tire yourself in obtaining it.”

The above passage is indeed food for thought. It splits minds open to spread in the hearts the quest towards the path of scientific perfection. No wonder the one who expressed such thought-provoking words is known till this day as the “Splitter and Spreader of Sciences”.

Who was he and what was his mission?

A good question, in view of the fact that today after the passing of 1377 lunar years to be exact, his birthday continues to be celebrated with increasing faith and fervour, while the world has forgotten even the names of the pompous potentates who were contemporary to him during the 57 years he graced Planet Earth – let alone any trace of the ornate palaces they built, or their coffers that overflowed with the loot of the lands they conquered from West and Central Asia, to North Africa, and to Spain and southern France in Europe.

If for some of our readers it is still not clear as to whose birth anniversary we celebrate every year on the 1st of Rajab (the first of the four months decreed sacred by God), let me reproduce here a famous statement from Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) to one of his loyal companions named Jaberibn Abdullah al-Ansari: “O Jaber, you will have a long life, and although you will go blind, you will meet the 5th in line of my descendants, whose name will be my name, who will walk like me and who will be the 5th Imam of the time. When you meet him, convey to him my salaam.”

Another version of the above hadith adds the phrase “Baqer al-Uloum” (Splitter and Spreader of Sciences) as the epithet of the person prophesied.

Thus, with the identity crystal clear, it would be repetitive to say Imam Muhammad Baqer(AS) was 5th in descent from the Prophet on both sides – his father, Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS) was the son of the Prophet’s younger grandson, Imam Husain (AS) the Martyr of Karbala, while his mother, Fatema (SA) was the daughter of the Prophet’s elder grandson, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (AS).

Born towards the closing years of the almost 20-year long usurpation of the caliphate by that despicable Omayyad tyrant, Mu’awiyahibn Abu Sufyan, who spared no crime against Islam including the public cursing from pulpits of the One and Only Amir al-Momeen (Commander of the Faithful), Imam Ali ibn Abi Taleb (AS), he was hardly four years old when YazidibnMu’awiyah subjected the Holy Family to the heartrending tragedy of Karbala and its equally tragic aftermath during which he found himself a captive along with his parents and other members of the Prophet’s Household.

On release from the dungeon of Damascus and return home to Medina, he watched from safe distance the havoc wrought by Yazid’s forces on the Prophet’s shrine and on the holy Ka’ba in Mecca.

When Yazid fell into the bowels of hell, he saw his son, Mu’awiyah II abdicate the detested caliphate by recounting the Omayyad crimes against Islam and humanity.

The caliphate (that had veered off its course since the scandalous gathering of Saqifa Bani Sa’da where his grandfather, Imam Ali’s (AS) right to rule the Ummah was usurped by dubious persons), was then seized by the Godless Marwan ibn al-Hakam, whom the Prophet had banished for his insulting of Islam.

In 64 AH, when Imam Muhammad Baqer (AS) was seven years old, Marwan – one of the instigators of the seditious Battle of Jamal against Imam Ali (AS) at Basra in 36 AH – was succeeded by his son Abdul-Malik in Damascus, while in the Arabian Peninsula, Abdullah ibn Zubayr (the chief instigator of the Battle of Jamal), took power, styled himself caliph, and subjected the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt to untold calamities.

Although some respite for the Ahl al-Bayt came when IbnZubayr was killed in 73 AH following a 9-year tussle for control of the entire Islamic realm with the Omayyads, and Abdul-Malik embarked on conquest of foreign lands, the next ruler, Walid ibn Abdul-Malik (conqueror of Spain), did not for a moment neglect the Omayyad animosity against the

Prophet's family, and martyred Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS) in 95 AH through a fatal dose of poison.

For 34 years, after the tragedy of Karbala, Imam Muhammad Baqer (AS) had stood beside his father in rebuilding the tattered fabric of the Islamic society.

He braved the separation, and for the next 19 years – along with his son and successor, Imam Ja'far as-Sadeq (AS) – continued his divinely-decreed mission as the 5th Imam of mankind, as caliphs rose and fell in Damascus, until his own martyrdom through poisoning in 114 AH by the tyrant Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik.

In the meantime, he built upon the legacy of his father, to lay the foundation of the famous academy of Medina that would produce in the next generation scholars and scientists of repute in every field including the Father of Chemistry, JaberibnHayyan (Geber to Europe).

Ten self-styled Omayyad caliphs were thus the contemporaries of Imam Baqer (AS), and the only positive occurrence of their rule, was the two-and-a-half year caliphate of Omar ibn Abdul-Aziz (a descendent of Omar ibn Khattab from his mother's side), who remorseful for the injustices inflicted by his predecessors upon the Ahl al-Bayt, stopped the cursing of Imam Ali (AS), begged the 5th Imam for admonition, and returned to him the vast orchard of Fadak that was the God-given property of the Prophet's Immaculate Daughter, Hazrat Fatema Zahra (SA), from whom the victors of the sedition of Saqifa had unjustly seized – and Hisham would seize again.

“O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and those vested with authority among you...”

What we read was ayah 59 of Surah Nisa of the Holy Qur'an, which speaks about persons vested with Divine Authority. The prominent Iranian scholar Mohammad ibn Babawayh Shaikh Sadouq has narrated over a thousand years ago through his chain of narrators from the illustrious companion of the Prophet, Jaber ibn Abdullah al-Ansari that on revelation of this ayah, Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) was asked: “O Messenger of Allah! We know Allah and his Messenger, but who are those vested with authority whose obedience Allah has conjoined to your obedience?”

The Prophet said: “O Jaber! They are my caliphs and the Imams of the Muslims after me. The first of them is Ali son of Abu Taleb, then Hasan, then Husain, then Ali son of al-Husain, then Mohammad son of Ali who is mentioned as al-Baqer in the Torah (that God revealed to Prophet Moses); you will surely meet him, O Jaber! When you see him convey my salaam to him...”

The hadith related by the faithful Jaber does not stop here, and goes on to list the other Imams by name until the 12th and Last of them who after a long period of occultation will rise as Qa'em al-Mahdi (AS) to cleanse the earth of all vestiges of tyranny and corruption by establishing the global government of peace, prosperity and justice. Needless to say, Jaber lived long for well over half-a-century after the passing away of the Prophet. As prophesied, he did meet the Prophet's great-great-grandson, Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS), and conveyed to him the Prophet's greetings. Today marks the start of blessed Rajab, the month of striving for the proximity of God, through special prayers, supplications, fasting, and other virtuous deeds including social charities, resistance against injustice and temptations, and of course, seeking of knowledge for reformation of the self and for progress of the community. It is the month in which God Almighty formally ordained Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) as the Last and Final Messenger to mankind with the universal of mission of “Islam”, as had been prophesied by all Prophets of the past and which is Arabic for submission to none except the One and Only God, peace, and healthy way of life.

Surely, many of the faithful are fasting today and are busy in healthy pursuits for the benefit of the self and the society, after having spent the night heralding the advent of Rajab in exclusive prayers, supplications, contemplations on solving the problems of fellow Muslims, and of course, recitation of the special ziyarah or salutation to the Chief of Martyrs, Imam Husain (AS), who taught with his lifeblood how to safeguard humanitarian values without compromising ethereal ideals. According to a famous narration, it was on the 1st of Rajab that on God's commandment Prophet Noah had boarded the Ark of Salvation along with his true followers and a pair of every species of birds and animals from his home in what is now the Jame' Mosque of Kufa in Iraq, in order to be safe from the Great Deluge brought upon themselves by the unrepentantly intransigent sinners, including his own devilishly disobedient son, Canaan. In view of the significance of the day, Noah – whose followers at the onset of the Great Deluge numbered a mere 80 despite several centuries of patient preaching of the Word of God in the face of the obstructionist efforts of the arrogantly ignorant disbelievers – had instructed all those on board the Ark to observe fast. It was a salvaging act indeed for the refinement of the human soul with full knowledge of its practicability in God-oriented societies, which Divine Providence decided to reward

millenniums later in 57 AH with the birth of the Embodiment of Knowledge in the form of Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS).

This direct descendant of Noah and Abraham was not just the namesake of Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) but the 5th Imam of the Blessed Ahl al-Bayt, whom many an authentic narration describes as the Immortal Ark of Salvation. As narrated by both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, the Prophet had said in clear words: "The likeness of my Ahl al-Bayt is that of Noah's Ark; whoever boards it is safe and whoever lags behind is drowned."

A thought-provoking statement indeed! To be more precise, Noah's Ark, although it did a great salvaging act in protecting human, bird, and animal species that gradually multiplied and spread around the face of the globe, it was after all a mere wooden vessel which could not be considered as the all-time Ship of Salvation. It is here that the Ahl al-Bayt of Prophet Mohammad (SAWA), including Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS), who come to the rescue of mankind in every age and place, with their perennially enlightened role in salvaging individuals and societies with firm emphasis on the practicability of knowledge.

If his father Imam Zain al-Abedin (AS) was the son of the Prophet's younger grandson Imam Husain (AS), his mother Hazrat Fatema (SA) was the daughter of the Prophet's elder grandson Imam Hasan (AS). As a mere boy of four years, he witnessed the heartrending tragedy of Karbala and was imprisoned in its aftermath in Damascus, along with his parents and other members of the Prophet's Noble Household. Soon the noble family was released from the prison of the tyrant Yazid and returned to Medina. Here, Imam Baqer (AS) stood steadfast beside his father for 34 years in nurturing back to life the tree of Islam. Then in the next 19 years until his own martyrdom at the age of 57 years in 114 AH, he shouldered the divine mission of imamate in those dark days of Omayyad tyranny, when the political rule of the dubious caliphate was spreading across the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe, while the letter and spirit of Islamic teachings were being undermined by the self-styled Muslim rulers. In such a suffocating atmosphere, Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS) spared no efforts to enlighten the seekers of truth with the pristine message of the holy Qur'an. On his authority, Muslims learned of the exemplary life of Prophet Mohammad (SAWA). To him chroniclers of hadith and history are indebted for the accounts of the Prophets of the past including Noah.

It was the 5th Imam who taught the correct understanding and explanation of the Revealed Word of God, the Holy Qur'an, at a time when the un-Islamic policies of the self-styled caliphs were playing havoc with the society. At the same time, Imam Baqer (AS), despite his splitting of the atoms of sciences and his opening up of the molecules of knowledge – over a millennium before such discoveries by modern science – practically tilled his own patch of garden even in midday heat, considering it to be an act of worship to God, and thereby teaching the dignity of labour in Islam. He lived a simple life, but nonetheless stood up to the injustices of the Omayyad regime. For this reason, he was forced to come to Damascus, Syria, by the self-styled caliph, Hesham, along with his son, Imam Ja'far Sadeq (AS). In the prison, the 5th Imam did wonders by instilling faith in the inmates and transforming them to repentant and reformed persons. The horrified Hesham freed father and son, but did not allow them to return to Medina. Here in Damascus, the 5th Imam took opportunity of his stay to debate with the chief Christian Monk of Syria and convinced him of the truth of Islam. The regime became more alarmed and sent back Imam Mohammad Baqer (AS) to Medina, where shortly afterward, the 5th Imam attained martyrdom as a result of Hesham's poisoning of the saddle which the Imam had to use for riding his mount. Once again we congratulate you on the blessed birthday of the Prophet's 5th Infallible Successor, and here is a wise statement from him: "You are the son of three days; your birthday, the day on which you will be taken to your grave, and the day on which you will be resurrected to meet your Lord. That will be surely a horrible day."