

The Expounder of Knowledge

Father: Abu Ja'far Ali Zain ul Abedin (AS)

Mother: Fatima bint al Hasan (SA) known as Umme Abdullah.

Birth: Madinah, on Tuesday, 1st Rajab 57 AH.

Martyrdom: Martyred at the age of 57, in Medina on Monday, 7th Dhu al Hejja 114 AH; poisoned by Hisham ibn Abdi al Malik; buried in Jannatul Baqi', in Madinah.

The Noble Imam Muhammad al Baqir (AS) is the fifth holy Imam. His epithet was Abu Ja'far and he was popularly titled 'al Baqir'. His mother was the daughter of Imam Hasan (AS). Thus, he was the only Imam who was connected with Hazrat Fatima (SA), both from his paternal and maternal sides.

Imam Muhammad al Baqir (AS) was brought up in the holy lap of his grandfather Imam Hussain (AS) for three years. For thirty- four years he was under the gracious patronage of his father, Ali Zain ul Abedin (AS).

The Noble Imam (AS) was present in Karbala at the time of the gruesome tragedy of the massacre of his grandfather Imam Hussain (AS) and his companions. He also suffered with his father and the ladies of the House of the Prophet (Ahl ul Bayt) through the heartless captivity and imprisonment at the hands of the devilish forces at the command of Yazid ibn Muawiyah.

After the tragedy of Karbala, the Imam (AS) passed his time peacefully in Madinah praying to Allah and guiding the people to the right path. The downfall of the Umayyads had begun since Yazid, the son of Muawiyah, had slaughtered Imam Hussain (AS). Yazid himself had completely realized the evil consequences of his deeds even during the short period of his rule. His son Muawiyah, the second, refused to accept the caliphate saying: "I cannot favour such a throne, which has been erected on the basis of oppression and tyranny." Ibn Hajar al Haytami, a famous scholar belonging to the Sunni School says: Imam Muhammad al Baqir (AS) has disclosed the secrets of knowledge and wisdom and unfolded the principles of spiritual and religious guidance.

Nobody can deny his exalted character, his God-given knowledge, his divinely gifted wisdom and his obligation and gratitude towards the spreading of knowledge. He was a devoted and highly talented spiritual leader and for this reason he was popularly titled 'al Baqir' which means 'the expounder of knowledge'. Kind of heart, spotless in character, sacred by soul and noble by nature, the Imam devoted all his time in submission to Allah and in advocating the teachings of the Noble Prophet (SAW) and his descendants. It is beyond the power of a man to count the deep impression of knowledge and guidance left by the Imam (AS) on the hearts of the faithful. His sayings in devotion and abstinence, in knowledge and wisdom and in religious exercise and submission to Allah are so great in number that the scope of this discussion is quite insufficient to cover them all." (As Sawaiq ul muhriqah, p. 120).

The Noble Imam (AS) managed to collect the teachings and reforms of the Noble Prophet (SAW) and his Ahl ul bayt in the form of books. His pupils compiled books on different branches of science and arts under his instructions and guidance. In the excellence of his personal purity and goodly traits, the Holy Imam Muhammad al Baqir was a model of the Prophet and his great grandfather (SAW), Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). His admonitions created a spiritual sensation among the Muslims in general. He was not only hospitable even to his worst enemies but also used to continually exhort them to the right path. He urged people to earn their livelihood by their own hard work.

The Imam (AS) gave much importance to convening majalis (meetings) in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS). Kumayl ibn Zayd al-Asadi, one of the most famous and highly talented poets of that time, used to recite the elegy of Imam Hussain (AS) in those majalis. Such types of majalis were also greatly encouraged by Imam Ja'far as Sadiq (AS) and Imam Ali ar Rida (AS), the sixth and the eighth Imams. Imam Muhammad al Baqir (AS) continued his preaching peacefully till 114 AH. On the 7th Dhu al Hejja when he was fifty-seven years old, Hisham ibn Abdi ul Malik ibn Marwan, the ruler of those times, got him martyred through poisoning. The funeral prayers for this Noble Imam (AS) were conducted by his son Imam Ja'far as Sadiq (AS), the sixth Imam (AS), and his body was laid to rest in Jannatul Baqi' in Madinah.

Allamah Tabataba'i writes regarding Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al Baqir (AS):

" The word 'baqir' means 'he who cuts and dissects', a title given to him by the Prophet (SAW)). Imam al Baqir (AS) was the son of the fourth Imam (AS) and was born in 57/675. He was present at the event of Karbala when he was four years old. After his father, through Divine Command and the decree of those who went before him, he became Imam. In the year

114/732 he was martyred. According to some Shi'a traditions, he was poisoned by Ibrahim ibn al Walid ibn Abdullah, the nephew of Hisham, the Umayyad caliph. During the Imamate of the fifth Imam (AS), as a result of the injustice of the Umayyads, revolts and wars broke out in some corner of the Islamic world every day.

Moreover, there were disputes within the Umayyad family itself which kept the caliphate busy and to a certain extent left the members of the Household of the Prophet (SAW) alone. From the other side, the tragedy of Karbala and the oppression suffered by the Household of the Prophet (SAW) of which the fourth Imam (AS) was the most noteworthy embodiment, had attracted many Muslims to the Imam (AS). These factors combined to make it possible for people and especially the Shi'as to go in great numbers to Madina and to come into the presence of the fifth Imam (AS).

Possibilities for disseminating the truth about Islam and the sciences of the Household of the Prophet (SAW), which had never existed for the Imams before him, were presented by the fifth Imam (AS). The proof of this fact is the innumerable traditions recounted from the fifth Imam (AS) and the large number of illustrious men of science and Shi'a scholars who were trained by him in different Islamic sciences. These names are listed in books of biographies of famous men in Islam."

Some famous sayings of Imam al-Baqir (AS):

1. Conceit (kibr) does not enter the heart of any man without decreasing an equal degree from his intellect. (Safinat ul-Bihar, p. 460)
2. Cheerfulness of face in one's social interactions invites the love of people and results in proximity to Allah. (Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 17, p. 164)
3. The most wretched of the servants (of Allah) is he who nurtures desires, the attainment of which lead him to shame and humiliation. (Safinat ul-Bihar, p. 93)

Sources:

1. A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles, Ansarian Publication.
2. Shi'a, by Allama Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Tabatabaie.