

## Imam Muhammad Baqir (A.S.), a Peerless Personality

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"Personality means to avoid greed so as not to be humble, avoid begging so as not to be disgraced, avoid niggardliness so as not to be insulted, and avoid ignorance so as not to be opposed."

Thus spoke the person, whose peerless personality has stood the test of times over the past 1375 years since his birth this day in 57 AH in Medina.

He was the namesake of Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) and possessed such a unique personality that some half-a-century before his birth, his illustrious ancestor whom he never saw, had not only sent greetings to him through one of his trusted companions (Jaber ibn Abdullah al-Ansari who was destined to have a long life) but also conferred upon him the epithet of Splitter and Spreader of Sciences (Baqir al-Uloom).

And so deserving was this epithet that till this day the 5th Imam of the Prophet's Household is known as al-Baqer.

This very fact speaks volumes about his immaculate personality which remains spotlessly untarnished despite the fact that in Karbala before his eyes – as a 4-year old – almost all male members of his family, including his paternal grandfather (Imam Husain [AS]), grand uncles (Hazrat Abbas [AS] and his brothers), maternal uncles (Hazrat Abdullah [AS], Hazrat Qasem [AS], etc) and paternal uncles (Hazrat Ali Akbar [AS] and the 6-month babe Ali Asghar [AS]) were mercilessly martyred.

The tragedy did not stop here. The boy, along with his parents (Imam Zain al-Abedin [AS] and Hazrat Fatema [SA]), grand aunts (Hazrat Zainab [SA], Hazrat Omm Kulsoum [SA], etc) grandmothers, and other women and children of his household, including his less-than-four-year old paternal aunt, Hazrat Ruqaiyya (SA) – who eventually succumbed to torture in the dungeon of Damascus – were dragged in chains and fetters by the perpetrators of the tragedy over a thousand kilometers to Syria.

Actually these were the days in 61 AH when Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) witnessed the gory spectacle of the tyrant Yazid sitting on a gilded throne in the specially decorated court and blasphemously poking a cane at the decapitated head of Imam Husain (AS) placed in a tray before him, while in the other hand of this self-styled caliph was a goblet of wine.

It is for this reason, out of respect for the martyrs of Karbala, whom we mourn in the month of Safar as well, we don't celebrate the birthday of Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) with festivities.

Soon, on release from prison, the 5th Imam had his own novel jihad to wage. He did this in a wonderful manner by standing steadfastly beside his father for the next 34 years, during which the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt had to pass through more trials and tribulations that further firmed up their dynamic personalities.

For ten years, from 63 to 73 AH, father and son had to endure in the Hizaz that seditionist, Abdullah bin Zubair – the chief instigator of the Battle of Jamal near Basra in 36 AH against the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali [AS] – whose claim to the caliphate and holing up like a rat in the sacred precincts of the Masjid al-Haraam, resulted in the sacrilegious assault on the holy Ka'ba by the Omayyad infidels. In the second storming under the murderous Hajjaj ibn Yousuf, God's Symbolic House was utterly destroyed.

The divine mantle of Imamate that is beyond the reach of any usurper came to rest on the 5th Imam's shoulders in 95 AH when Imam Zain al-Abedin (AS) was martyred through a dose of poison by the Godless Waleed, who dared to masquerade as caliph of Muslims despite his blasphemous riddling of the holy Qur'an with a volley of arrows and his desecration of the sanctity of the prayers by ordering his drunk and ritually unclean concubine to lead the men's congregation.

For the next 19 years till his own martyrdom through poisoning by the despicable Hesham ibn Abdul-Malik in 114 AH at the age of 57 years, Imam Baqer's (AS) magnetic personality groomed such leading lights of Islam who could be called immortals. Names that come to mind are Zurara the master theologian, Muhammad bin Muslim bin Riyyah the eminent jurisprudent, Burayd the prominent jurisprudent, Abu Basir Lais al-Bakhtari the famous traditionist. These four have been described as the "Tent Pegs of the World."

Then there was Abu Hamzah Samali who held an esteemed place among the companions of the 5th Imam and through whom some moving supplications have been conveyed to posterity including the famous one recited by the faithful to this day before Sahar or late midnight in the fasting month of Ramadhan.

Among the Imam's companions was also the renowned poet and master of Arabic literature Kumayt bin Ziyad al-Asadi, whose panegyrics titled al-Hashemiyaat are still recited to this day.

Interestingly, it was Imam Baqer (AS), who has taught us the Ziyarat Ashura or the standard form of salutation on the 10th of Muharram for his grandfather, Imam Husain (AS). He told his disciple Alqama bin Hazrami on its regular recitation with the following instructions: "With face turned towards the shrine of Imam Husain (AS), first send salaams upon him and imprecate (la'nat) his killers. Then after performing a (special) two-rak'at prayer, recite the Ziyarat Ashura."

"O Alqama! If you recite this Ziyarat in this manner, it is as if you have performed the pilgrimage of Imam Husain (AS) in the manner of angels, and Allah will write for you thousands and thousands of rewards and forgive your thousands and thousands of sins. The one who recites this Ziyarat will be exalted by 100,000 degrees while his reward would be equal to those martyred along with Imam Husain (AS), to the extent that he will share the rewards of the martyrs (of Karbala) and will be recognized as from among them. His rewards will also equal the rewards of pilgrimages performed by every Prophet and Apostle since the martyrdom of Imam Husain (AS) till this day. Alqama, if possible, perform the pilgrimage of Imam Husain (PBUH) every day by (recitation of) this Ziyarat."