

Keys to Success in Life and Afterlife

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The auspicious 1st of Rajab, the month that opens our minds, sharpens our insight, firms up our hearts, refreshes our souls, and strengthens our spirit with renewed spiritual fervor for availing of the showers of Mercy that our Loving Creator has decreed for the seekers of truth and forgiveness.

It is the day which became doubly blessed in the year 57 AH with the birth in Medina of the 5th Infallible Heir and namesake of Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), whose epithet Baqer al-Uloom (Splitter and Spreader of Sciences). Incidentally, this year celebrations on his blessed birthday will reach climax with "Laylat ar-Ragha'eb" or the Night of Devotion to God that occurs on the First Friday eve of Rajab.

Imam Muhammad Baqer (AS) needs no introduction. The great-great grandson of the Prophet, he had the honour of lineal descent from the Prophet on both sides. If his father was Imam Zayn al-Abedin (AS), the son of Prophet's younger grandson, Imam Husain (AS), his mother Fatema (SA) was the daughter of the Prophet's elder grandson, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (AS).

During his 19-year mission as the representative of God on earth, he had the opportunity of promoting in society the genuine teachings of Islam inherited from the Prophet, since those were the days when the Omayyad usurpers were busy with the loot flowing into the coffers from the raids of their armies deeper and deeper into Asia, Africa and Europe.

The 5th Imam, who had witnessed the tragedy of Karbala as a 4-year boy and suffered imprisonment in Damascus in its aftermath at such a tender age – along with his parents, aunts and Grand Aunts Hazrat Zainab (SA) and Hazrat Omm Kolsoum (SA) – resolved to enlighten minds and souls of the ummah, after having seen his father gradually reweave for 34 long years the tattered fabric of the Islamic society.

He thus strengthened the foundations of the School of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt, which would flower and reach its peak under his son and successor, Imam Ja'far as-Sadeq (AS), at whose over 4,000 scholars and students learned different branches of sciences, ranging from theology and jurisprudence to medicine and astronomy.

Imam Baqer (AS), who despite his grooming of scholars, would at times love to toil under the blazing sun of Arabia by personally engaging in farming in order to set the practical example of dignified labour for earning of legal and lawful subsistence bread, has said the following in this regard: "There is no job better than farming and there is no benefit better than the benefit of farming, because benevolent and malevolent grazing animals and birds benefit from it and pray for the farmer."

Yet at the same time, he warned against being deceived and trapped by the glamour of transient life, as is evident by the following statement: "A person who seeks the world is like the silk-worm which becomes more and more incarcerated inside the cocoon the more silk it wounds around and dies inside it."

He also said: "A seeker of the world is like the sheep that ventures into the grassland to feed. It fattens, and the same fattening becomes the cause of its death under the butcher's knife! Remember, when you go before Allah, four questions will be asked: How did you spend your youth? What work you did during your lifetime? From where did you acquire wealth? Where did you spend your wealth? So prepare your replies to these questions.

Following are some more of his wise statements in this regard: "The exterior of the world is very attractive and in fact it is very destructive! It looks pretty like a snake, soft and cuddly! But its nature is venomous! The wise keeps an eye on its venom and escapes from it. The gullible plays with it like a child!

"This world is transient! The Prophet of Islam (S) has said, "The world is like a tree for men to have a respite under its shadow and depart!"

Imam Baqer (AS), however did not preach asceticism, but discourages such unnatural habits by encouraging people to marry, raise children, and cater to their needs in lawful and legal manner. He has narrated the following hadith from his ancestor, Prophet Muhammad (SAWA): "This (Islam) is a firm and decisive Faith! Scale its heights, but calmly! Don't put excessive weight of prayer on your bodies! Don't be like a rider who tires his animal by travelling more than it possibly can! It may fail to carry you to your destination! Satan has misguided some of our people and made them abstain from meat and other delicacies. Such abstention is against the Shariah.

When asked to expound the meaning of the following ayah of the holy Qur'an (4:59), which the Godless usurpers of the Islamic realm had tried to attribute to their questionable rule, with the help of court-mullahs: "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and

those in authority from among you”, Imam Baqer (AS) said: “God refers to us; He has ordered all the believers from now until the Day of Judgment to obey us (the infallible Imams).”

I end this column with a brief supplication taught to us by the 5th Imam whenever we start some work or leave the house: “In the Name of Allah the All-Merciful the All-Compassionate; Allah is sufficient for me and I have trust in Him. O Allah I beseech You for prosperity in all my affairs, and I seek refuge in You from humiliation in this world and punishment in afterlife.”