

Cleaver of Knowledge

By: Seyyed Ali Shahbaz

"O Jabir, you will live until you meet one of my descendants through (my grandson) Hussayn, called Muhammad, who will cleave knowledge; when you meet him convey to him my greetings." (Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) as quoted by the famous Sunni scholar Ibn Sabbagh Maleki in Fusul al-Muhimma).

Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari did live as the Prophet had predicted, and when he met the young grandson of Imam Hussayn (AS), Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (AS), he faithfully conveyed to him the Prophet's greetings.

The first of Rajab (Aug. 29 this year), the birth anniversary of the 5th Imam (57 AH), affords us the chance to reflect on the God-given merits of Baqir al-Uloum or Cleaver of Knowledge as the Prophet had prophesied him.

He was four-years old at the tragedy of Karbala, where he was taken captive by the Umayyads along with his father Imam Zayn al-Abidin (AS) and the ladies and children of the Prophet's Household. He was descended on both sides from the Prophet since his mother Fatima was the daughter of Imam Hassan (AS). The blessed family were soon released and returned to Medina. For the next 34 years he and his father rebuilt from pieces the shattered fabric of the Islamic society.

In 95 AH, the mantle of divinely-designated leadership fell on the shoulders of Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS). During the next 19 years he firmed up the foundations of the famous academy of Medina which was to blossom under his son and successor, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (AS), one of whose pupils was Jaber ibn Hayyan (Geber to medieval Europe) the father of chemistry.

Knowledge was thus split open by the Prophet's Household for the benefit of the humanity at large. Imam Baqir (AS) groomed scholars in different fields ranging from traditional learning to natural sciences. Jurists sat in his presence to hear the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an and to write down the sunna and seera of his ancestor the Prophet. Historians compiled accounts of the Prophet's campaigns on his authority.

The caliphs sought his advice when confronted with problems. It was on the 5th Imam's suggestion that the first mint was established in the Islamic realm and thus the draining of the bullion to Byzantine Christians in exchange for the supply of the coins was stopped.

But these Umayyad usurpers never missed a chance to torment him and other members of the Prophet's family, and it was the tyrant Hisham ibn Abdel-Malik who poisoned this repository of knowledge, after the famous incident when the leading Christian hermit of Syria embraced Islam along with many of his followers, following the debate with Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS).

On the auspicious occasion of his birth anniversary, let us hear what our Sunni brethren have to say concerning the 5th firm pillar of Islamic unity. Ibn Imad Hanbali writes: "He was called Baqir al-Uloum because he used to cleave open knowledge, reached to its roots and expand on it".

Ibn Jawzi records the account of an eyewitness: "I never saw the scholars so humble in their knowledge except in the presence of Abu Ja'far al-Baqir".

Malik bin A'yan al-Juhni used to say in praise of him: "When the people seek knowledge of the Qur'an, Quraysh rely upon him. If someone asked where is the son of the daughter of the Prophet, you would gain through him the wide branches (of knowledge). You are like stars which shine for night travellers. You are like mountains which have inherited vast knowledge."

Among the followers of the Ahl ul-Bayt, whenever Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi reported anything on Imam Baqir's authority, he used to say: "The trustee of the trustees (of the Prophet) and the heir of the knowledge of the prophets, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Hussayn (AS) told me."

Greetings to the one who was greeted by the Prophet (SAWA) before birth.