

## IMAM ALI

## امام علي (ع)

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Learn one of the titles of Imam 'Ali (as) and its meaning
- Learn the concept of Submission to Allah
- Understand Islam as a religion of submission
- Use the quality of submission to Allah in Imam 'Ali and learn from it

## FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

## LEVEL 3

### IMAM 'ALI (AS): AN INTRODUCTION

#### BASIC FACTS

**Name** – 'Ali

**Title** – Amīrul Mu'minīn- the Commander of the Believers

**Other name** - Abul Ḥasan

**Born** - 13th of Rajab, in the Holy Ka'bah

**Father's Name** - Abu Ṭālib

**Mother's Name** – Fāṭimah bint Asad

**Died** – at the age of 63 years, in Kūfah, on the 21st of Ramaḍan in the year 40 AH.

**Buried** - in Najaf, near Kūfah

### AMĪRUL MU'MINĪN- THE COMMANDER OF THE BELIEVERS

This title was given to the Imam (as) on the day of Ghadr, when Prophet Muḥammad (saw) announced that Imam 'Ali (as) would be his successor. This happened as the Muslims were returning from Ḥajj. Some narrations say that there were over 100,000 people there that day to hear this announcement.

After a detailed speech, the Prophet (saw) said to the Muslims: "Whoever considers me their master shall consider 'Ali (as) as his master".

All the people congratulated Imam 'Ali (as) for getting this title.



Imam 'Ali Shrine - Najaf Ashraf (Iraq) 1



Imam 'Ali Shrine - Najaf Ashraf (Iraq) 2

## LESSONS FROM IMAM 'ALI'S LIFE

Imam 'Ali's (as) life was a true example of submission and devotion to Allah, the Almighty. Imam 'Ali (as) never went against the will of His Lord and Creator. He also showed extreme devotion to the Prophet (saw), which is another way of showing submission to Allah (SWT). He was so devoted to the Prophet (saw) that he says: "I followed the foot-steps of Prophet Muḥammad (s) like a baby camel follows the foot-steps of its mother"<sup>i</sup>

This submission allowed him to develop many amazing and unique traits. We cannot discuss all of them in this lesson, but the following are two famous stories in which the Imam's submission towards Allah (SWT) was witnessed by his companions:

### **PAIN OF THE ARROW**

During the Battle of Uḥud, Imam 'Ali (as) was struck by an arrow which lodged in his leg. He fought on till the end of the battle and defended the Prophet (saw). At the end of the battle, the arrow was still in his leg, and it had to be taken out. Pulling an arrow out of one's body is usually extremely painful, so the Imam's friends and family were wondering how to best do it. At this point, the Imam's wife, Fāṭimah (as) suggested something. She said that when 'Ali (as) is praying, he does not pay attention to anything else and it is impossible to distract him, so she suggested they pull the arrow out while he was praying.

They waited for Imam 'Ali (as) to start praying and then the arrow was pulled out. Amazingly, the Imam (as) did not even feel the arrow coming out and did not pay any attention to it.

This shows the amazing devotion of Imam 'Ali (as) and how close he was to His Creator.

### **IMAM 'ALI (AS) DEFINED ISLAM**

One day, the Imam (as) promised his companions that he would define Islam for them as it had never been defined before. He began this definition by saying: 'Islam is submission'. By doing this, he showed them that the most important aspect of being a Muslim is to submit to Allah's Will. Submission is to give up control to someone else. The Imam (as) was encouraging them to give up control of their lives to Allah, the Wise, by following His commandments, and by preferring the decisions Allah made for them over the decisions they made for themselves. The Imam concluded the definition by saying that submission eventually leads to appropriate action. Here, he was teaching his companions that we cannot be true Muslims by simply saying that we submit. Rather, our actions should show that we are submissive. When we really want to do something but know that Allah has forbidden it, we should show our submission by acting according to Allah's rules and not our own desires. Only in this way can we be true Muslims.

### **SUBMISSION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS**

The only way to make sure that we live happy, successful lives is to submit to Allah (SWT). Let us look at some examples:

- It's lunchtime at school and my friends all head to the canteen to buy lunch. They all buy chicken

sandwiches which smell very good. But I know that the chicken in my canteen is not halal. Here I have a choice. Do I listen to my desire and eat this chicken which is not halal? Or do I listen to Allah (SWT) and control my desires?

- Later at lunchtime, my friends gang up on one of the boys and start to tease and bully him. I don't feel comfortable about what they're doing, because he looks hurt by what their actions, and I know it's wrong to hurt people. Should I listen to my friends and submit to them and join in the bullying? Or should I submit to God and help the boy out or at least not join in the bullying?

If we want to live good lives, we should always put what Allah (SWT) wants before what we want. This is true submission to Allah (SWT).

## Review Questions

### Q1. Amīrul Mu'minīn means:

- a. The Leader of the Men
- b. The Leader of the Muslims
- c. The Leader of the Believers

### Q2. Submission to Allah (SWT) means:

- a. Doing what Allah wants and not what we want
- b. Saying we believe in Allah
- c. Saying that we obey Allah

### Q3. Imam 'Ali (as) defined Islam as:

- a. Pride
- b. Knowledge
- c. Submission

## LESSON 2: IMAM 'ALI (AS) AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUBMISSION

When we submit ourselves to Allah, we see many benefits in our life. Let us discuss some of these benefits.

### DEALING WITH TESTS IN LIFE

The first benefit of submission is that we can deal with tests better.

We have been put into this world to be tested, and we have discussed this in previous lessons. Sometimes, Allah (SWT) tests us with things that are out of our control. For example, we become sick, or we lose a family member, or we become suddenly poor. How should we react to these hardships?

Non-believers see these hardships as random things and part of the 'cruelty' of life. You see that non-believers turn to drugs, alcohol and sometimes even kill themselves when they are faced with hardships because to them it makes no sense and has no greater purpose. However, as we have discussed before, these are tests which have great benefits for us. Therefore, we should deal with them with patience and gratefulness. When we are tested, we should avoid complaining too much and we should not give up on the mercy of God. We should remember that every test has some good in it for us eventually and so we should thank Allah (SWT) in every state.

In the end, if we are believers, whatever Allah sends our way is good for us and so we should try to develop the habit of always asking for the best from Allah, rather than asking for what we want and what we think is best.

We had the opportunity of seeing something similar in our lifetime. Imam Khomeini, towards the end of his life, was in great pain due to his disease. However, when he would pray, he was so devoted in his prayers that it would be as if the pain had all disappeared. Here is a video which shows how content he was near the end of his life :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJZehMWTRqI>

## BRAVERY

Once we submit to Allah, we will do what He says, no matter what anyone else says. We will not be scared or embarrassed from people, and will follow Allah's orders no matter what. Here is an example of this from the life of Imam 'Ali (as)

The first occasion on which Imam 'Ali (as) offered his services to the cause of Islam was when the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) was first ordered by Allah (SWT) to preach Islam openly. This occasion is known as Da'wat al-'Ashīra - Holy Prophet Muhammad's (saw) first public invitation.

Prophet Muḥammad (saw) preached Islam in small secret groups for three years. After this, Allah (SWT) ordered him to start preaching more publicly to his family.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) organised a feast for his close family members and invited them all to gather so that he could deliver the message to them. About forty of them accepted the invitation and came, but Abu Lahab, made the company break up before Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) had an opportunity to speak. The next day, a second invitation was issued and when they came, the Prophet took the opportunity to pass on the message.

Then Prophet Muḥammad (saw) rose and declared his sacred mission and said:

*“O sons of Abdul Muṭṭalib. Almighty Allah (SWT) has assigned me to warn you of the painful torments of the wrongdoers and give you the good news of His reward to the pious believers. Become Muslims and follow me so that you can be saved. I swear by Almighty Allah (SWT) that among all Arabs I do not know anyone who has brought his people anything better than what I have brought you”*

After the Prophet (saw) passed on the message, he asked for help from his family. He asked:

*“Now which one of you is willing to help me with the task...anybody who announces his readiness to help me to bear this burden will be my brother, my successor, and the executor of my will, as Aaron was unto Moses?”*

The assembly remained silent with astonishment, not one wanting or daring to accept. After a long silence, Imam 'Ali (as), a young man of 13 at the time, stepped

up and said that he would take this position. The older men in the gathering, like Abu Lahab, mocked him, but he did not stand down.

He said: *“O Prophet! I will, though I am indeed the youngest of those present... O Messenger of Allah (SWT)! I am your assistant. I am your supporter.”*

Prophet Muḥammad (saw) asked him to sit down. He (saw) repeated the same saying three times but no one except Imam 'Ali (as) replied to him. On this, locking his arms around the generous and courageous youth, and pressing him, the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) declared: *“Behold my brother and my successor and the executor of my will among you. Listen to him and obey him.”*<sup>ii</sup>

Despite his young age, Imam 'Ali (as) was never lazy in his tasks to assist the Messenger or lazy in spreading the message of Islam. Nor did he ever fear anyone. Because of his total submission to Allah (SWT), he did not care what anyone said, as long as he was following the orders of Allah (SWT). This is why he was the bravest warrior and the greatest defender of the Prophet (saw).

## THE ETIQUETTE OF SUBMISSION

We have seen some of the great benefits of submission. Now, let us see how we can show our submission to Allah in everyday life:

- Praying on time
- Doing as many good deeds as possible (smiling, helping others, talking nicely) and keeping away from as many evil deeds as possible (anger, swearing, fight, back biting)
- Always being honest
- Thanking Allah, the Merciful, for what He has given us
- Remaining patient during difficulties and not complaining too much
- Avoiding questioning Allah's Will and Laws

## Review Questions

**Q1. When the Prophet asked for a supporter from his family, who responded?**

- a. Abu Lahab
- b. Abu Bakr
- c. Imam 'Ali (as)

## Q2. One of the effect of submission to Allah (SWT)

is:

- Being scared of people
- Being brave in the way of Allah
- Being poor

### LESSON 3: IMAM ALI- WORKING FOR ALLAH (SWT)

In the previous lesson we have discussed the life of Imam 'Ali (as) and some of his titles. Imam 'Ali (as), as we have learnt, can be considered the best of the students of the Holy Prophet (saw). He was the most learned after the Prophet and was the closest to the Prophet (saw) such that the Prophet said "I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate". In this lesson we shall learn some of the characteristics of Imam 'Ali (as) that made him such a great personality, which is the characteristic of hard work and self-reliance. Before we talk about that, let's learn some more about his life and childhood.

### THE CHILDHOOD OF IMAM 'ALI (AS)

Imam 'Ali (as) was born six years after the marriage of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) with Sayyedah Khadījah (sa). Although Imam 'Ali (as) lived with his father and brothers for six years, he (as) moved to Prophet Muḥammad's (saw) house because of the financial crisis which befell his father, Abu Ṭālib (as). Since that early age, Imam 'Ali (as) lived with the Messenger of Allah (saw). It was there that he spent his adolescence, and during this time he was a close observer of all the developments that happened in the life of the Messenger of Allah (saw). Imam 'Ali's (as) education was not an ordinary one, nor one which a normal child receives from his father, or elder brothers. The training and instruction he received was very special and it suffices to know that he followed the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) like his shadow.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

*"...you know what my relations with the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (saw) were? From the very beginning of my life, he loved me and I loved him...He never found me lying nor weak and wavering."<sup>iii</sup>*

Imam 'Ali (as) was the first to believe in the Holy Prophet (saw) and was taught everything first-hand from the Prophet himself from a very young age. Even later, when Allah (SWT) first ordered the Prophet to introduce Islam to his relatives, Imam 'Ali (as) was the first to defend Islam and assist the Prophet (saw).

### HARD WORK IN ISLAM

Imam 'Ali (as) was one of the best examples of working hard in everything we do. He demonstrated to us that as Muslims, we should work hard to get what we want and need while not taking advantage of others.

Working hard means that we do not give up when things become difficult to bear. In school, for instance, if we are having difficulty with mathematics or science, we should not quit and give up. Rather, we should work hard to learn and get help when needed.

Imam 'Ali (as) was a very hard-working man. He worked hard while farming and cultivating orchards. He developed several plots and orchards and then gave them all away for the sake of Allah (SWT). One day, Imam 'Ali (as) acquired a piece of barren land outside Madīnah which he wanted to cultivate. In order to do this, the Imam (as) decided to dig a well, he chose a suitable place and putting his hopes in the grace of Allah (SWT), he began to dig. Several days went by, but still there was no sign of any water coming out of the well.

One day, Imam 'Ali (as) picked up a pickaxe, entered the well and using all his strength and energy worked very hard for a while, but still there was no sign of water. Exhausted, he came out of the well, wiped away the sweat of his brow, rested for a while, and then re-entered the well. The Imam (as) was swinging the pickaxe with such vigour that the sound of his breathing could be heard all around. After receiving a strong, hard blow with the pickaxe, the ground suddenly split open, and fresh, clear water bubbled up.

Imam 'Ali (as) climbed quickly out of what had now become a wonderful well in the dry desert which would soon turn the surrounding area into a lovely orchard. Soon the people gathered around to see it. Each of them was commenting on it. 'What a hard-working man is Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Ṭālib (as)'.

One said: ‘Since Imam ‘Ali ibn Abu Ṭālib (as) is a good and generous man, Allah (SWT) has been generous to him and given him goodness’. Another said: ‘Imam ‘Ali ibn Abu Ṭālib (as) and his descendants have become rich forever’. Some congratulated Imam ‘Ali (as), while some were jealous.

*"Bring me a paper and pen!" said Imam ‘Ali (as). When they had done so, the Imam (as) sat down and wrote:*

*"I have endowed this well and the land surrounding it in charity; for its income to be used as follows:*

*In helping the poor and destitute.*

*In helping the travellers far away from their homes.*

*In providing the means for the marriages of orphans.*

*In providing medical care for the poor.*

*In the doing of good works of public benefit."*<sup>iv</sup>

What we learn from this lesson of the Imam is that when we want something, it's not enough to pray for it, we have to work really hard to try and get it for ourselves. Its only when we help ourselves will Allah (SWT) help us.

## **SELF-RELIANCE**

Imam ‘Ali (as) also taught us another very important lesson, that of self-reliance. Self-reliance means that when we are able to do something ourselves, we do not rely on others to do those things for us. Imam ‘Ali (as) mended his own clothes and his own shoes, milked his own goats, drew water from the wells, and loaded and unloaded the camels of the caravans even though he was the leader of the community! We have to remember that to be self-reliant, we have to try to reduce our wants and only be reliant on others when we need something that we cannot obtain ourselves.

## **Class Activity**

There are many examples of self-reliance in our lives, from self-reliance in small things to very big things. In the table below, identify what is self-reliance and what is not.

Situation
Ordering my little brother to give me a glass of water when I can get up and get it myself
Asking my mother for \$15 for a game I don't need
Working hard to mow the lawns of my neighbours to earn some money to get the new pair of shoes I like
Borrowing money from a friend to buy a kebab
Going to the library to study to improve my marks in maths rather than claiming I am not good at maths and giving up (or cheating in my exam).
Ordering mum to prepare a snack for me when I am capable of doing it myself
Taking youth allowance from the government because I don't feel like working

## **WE ARE ALL RELIANT ON ALLAH (SWT)**

We should always remember that Allah (SWT) has given us the gifts of life, energy, hands, eyes etc. so that we can use these to help ourselves to the bounties He has kept on the earth. If man wants gold, he has to use his energy to dig it up from the ground, if he wants food, he should grow it or hunt it. We have to remember that Allah (SWT) is the provider of all the bounties and gifts and that we are eventually all reliant on Him.

## **Review Questions**

### **Q1. Self-reliance:**

- Is highly encouraged in Islam
- Is not encouraged in Islam
- Has nothing to do with Islam

### **Q2. Islam teaches us that:**

- We do not need to work hard, we only need to pray for things and we will get them
- We need to work hard and pray for what we want or need
- We should work very hard and if we work hard enough, we won't need to pray to get what we want

### **Q3. Imam ‘Ali (as) worked as a:**

- Farmer and cultivator
- Had no job
- Tailor

<sup>i</sup> Nahjul Balagha

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/service.to.islam.asp>

<sup>iii</sup> Khutbat Al- Qaasiya

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/imam'Ali>