

## IMAM AL-BAQIR <sup>(a.s)</sup>

### امام الباقر (ع)

#### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Get a brief overview of the historical context in which the Imam (as) lived
- Understand the types of knowledge encouraged by Islam
- Gain an insight into the importance of seeking Islamic knowledge

## FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

## LEVEL 4

### Imam al-Bāqir (as)

Seeking of knowledge has always been highly emphasized in Islam. Allah (SWT) equipped His prophets with extraordinary levels of knowledge as a tool to enlighten their communities and to make clear to them the main purpose of life. In every other era, seeking of knowledge has been made obligatory on mankind because it is only through this path that the intellect of a man is strengthened and overall progress in society can be achieved.

When we use the word 'knowledge' however, are we referring to knowledge only gained from schools and universities i.e. 'secular' knowledge, or do we only mean religious knowledge from Islamic books and mosques, or could it be both?

By focusing on Imam Bāqir's (as) life in this lesson, such questions will be answered. We will also see the emphasis the Imam placed on seeking knowledge, the guidelines of what kind of knowledge one should go after and the best way to approach learning such that we benefit both in this world and the next.

We shall begin by providing a brief overview of the historical context of the Imam so that we may understand the main reason for the sudden emanation of knowledge in this period.

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE IMAM (AS)

#### WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE IMAM MUḤAMMAD AL-BĀQIR'S TIME?

- The people who took the position of leadership and government after the Prophet were harsh towards

Ahlul Bayt and did not let them freely preach the true teachings of the Prophet.

- During this time, many narrations and teachings that the Prophet left behind were changed and manipulated.
- This restriction against Ahlul Bayt continued for about 90 years after the Prophet passed away.

### AT THE TIME OF IMAM AL-BĀQIR

- The government was weaker because they were fighting amongst themselves for power, so they could not pay as much attention to Ahlul Bayt and their teachings.
- However by that time, many people had wrong information about Islam.
- Also, other people were making up narrations (what the Prophet said) so they could sell them and make money.
- As you can tell this caused the spread of wrong information about Islam.

### THE IMAM'S REVOLUTION OF KNOWLEDGE

- People wanted to know the truth about the teachings of Islam. The only person they could find who could answer all their questions was Imam Bāqir. That is because he was al-Bāqir i.e. the one who knew all knowledge including the hidden knowledge that other people do not have access to.
- However, Imam al-Bāqir, and after him his son Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) did not only use this opportunity to teach about specific Islamic studies. They set up a university of sorts in which they taught all different types of sciences and had students specialising in various fields of science and research. They emphasised to people that it is not only knowledge of religion which is important, but also knowledge of the contemporary sciences.

### JĀBIR- A RESULT OF THE IMAM'S REVOLUTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Jābir ibn Ḥayyan was one of the students of Imam al-Ṣādiq (as), who continued the school established by Imam al-Bāqir (as). Jābir was an amazing scientist whose contributions in many scientific fields, particularly chemistry, are widely acknowledged today. He invented several types of laboratory equipment, as well as many chemicals widely used today. He emphasised the

scientific experimental method in his work in chemistry: "The first essential in chemistry", he declared, "is that you should perform practical work and conduct experiments, for he who performs not practical work nor makes experiments will never attain the least degree of mastery."

According to one modern western author, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) would ask Jābir for certain useful inventions and Jābir would set about inventing these things. Apparently, Jābir invented a kind of paper that resisted fire, and an ink that could be read at night.



Jaber's Inventions which we use in Chemistry Labs today:

- Almebic
- Retort
- Hydrochloric Acid
- Nitric Acid
- Sulfuric Acid



### USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

If we come back to the question of what kind of knowledge the Imams were referring to, we would realise that they placed emphasis on ANY knowledge that could be used to:

#### 1) REMIND OURSELVES OF ALLAH (SWT)

For instance, if a student in his or her science class learns about the vastness of the solar system, the different types of stars, the perfect positioning of the planets and so on, and if such knowledge triggers his mind and heart to think of Allah (SWT) as the intelligent designer of this marvellous creation, then such knowledge is the true knowledge. On the other hand you may have a student who simply learns facts from the same science class just for the sake of passing his exams. No one would benefit from such knowledge.

## 2) BENEFIT OTHERS

A doctor who has studied ten years of medicine simply to earn respect from his peers, earn enough money and live a comfortable life is considered very low in the eyes of Allah (SWT). Consider another doctor who gives special attention to the ill who cannot afford the usually expensive treatment. Wouldn't such a person be held very dear in the eyes of Allah (SWT)?

In this regard Imam al-Bāqir (as) says :

“The knowledgeable man who is beneficial to others as a result of his knowledge is better than seventy thousand worshippers”<sup>i</sup>

## 3) IMPROVE ONESELF BY PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Such knowledge would mainly include the seeking of Islamic knowledge. If after learning how to respect parents a student still continues to disobey them, then his or her knowledge according to our Imams is useless because it has not been put to practice. Similarly, studying the stories of our past prophets and knowing all the details is not enough since we need to derive lessons and apply them in our lives. Only then will our knowledge be useful.

To summarise the above points, any knowledge be it in our science class, jurisprudence, ethics or history that help us to remember Allah (SWT), to benefit others and knowledge that we put into practice is indeed the knowledge that Islam is stressing on.

## ENCOURAGEMENT TOWARDS SEEKING ALL TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Our studies in public and Islamic schools can get overwhelming and seem like a burden at times. It always helps to remind ourselves of the benefits of learning difference sciences. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

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<sup>i</sup> (Mizanul Hikam, no. 4471)

<sup>ii</sup> (Mizanul Hikam no. 4455).

<sup>iii</sup> Bibliography

Mizanul Hikam (section 288)

“Every container becomes cramped by what is placed therein except the container that holds knowledge, for verily it expands because of it”<sup>ii</sup>

## Homework

Commit yourself to do some research about careers over the next week. Pick the three that interest you most. List them and for each write a few sentences about how you can use this career to help Islam and Muslims. <sup>iii</sup>

## BRIEF SAYINGS OF THE IMAM

“Nobody remains safe from sin unless he guards his tongue.”

(TUAHFUL UQOOL, P 298)

“Indeed, Allah hates and despises those who curse, rebuke and are sarcastic in relation to the believers”.

(TUHAFUL UQOOL, P 300)

“Whosoever's tongue utters the truth, his practice becomes purified. And the one whose intention is decent and good, his sustenance increases. And whoever adopts a decent and nice attitude and behaviour with his family, his life is prolonged.”

(TUHAFUL UQOOL, P 295)

## Review Questions

### Q1. Which types of knowledge are useful?

- Those that can help us become wealthy later
- Those that will allow us to benefit others
- Those that are popular sciences today

### Q2. Imam al-Bāqir (as) taught his students:

- Islamic theology and jurisprudence only
- Chemistry and astronomy only
- Both 'Islamic' and 'secular' sciences

Mishkatul Anwar (no. 685)

The life of Imam Mohammed al BĀqir by BĀqir Sharif al- Qarashi.