

IMAM AL-'ASKARI [A.S]

امام العسكري (ع)

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Biographical detail of Imam al-'Askari (as)
- The reason for the titles of al-'Askari and al-Zaki
- That the Imam (as) was kept under constant surveillance all the time
- Why we should fear none other than Allah (SWT)
- The importance and benefits of fearing God

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Imam al-'Askari (as)

- Born in Medina on the 10th of Rabi'ul Thāni 232 AH
- Died in Samarrā', Iraq on 8th of Rabi'ul Awwal 260 AH aged 28 years
- Period of Imamat was six years
- Being a resident of 'Askar, a suburb of the city of Samarrā', he was given the title of al-'Askari

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari (as) lived a short life (only 28 years) and in this short life he had to endure great suffering at the hands of the Abbasid caliphs. But in spite of all that suffering and confinement under house arrest in Samarrā', many students of Islam benefited from his God-gifted knowledge and later became scholars in their fields.

Historians say that during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (as) suffered neediness and deprivation so bitter and horrible that it could not be described. Their poverty reached such an extent that a whole family would have only one cloak, and whenever the man or woman wanted to go out, they would wear it, such that they could never go out at the same time. People refrained from associating with the followers and descendants of the Ahlul Bayt for fear of being punished by the government for doing so.

The Abbasids persecuted the people of Qum (which was known as a Shi'ah city) and treated them with oppression and terror. They appointed Mūsā ibn Yaḥyā, who was wicked and unjust, as a ruler over them. He was impolite, immoral, and inhuman.

He treated people in a very bad way and exaggerated in oppressing them until the notables of Qum resorted to Imam al-'Askari (as) complaining to him about what was being done to them.

The Imam (as) prayed to Allah the Almighty to save them from the evil of that mean, oppressive ruler, and taught them a supplication and asked them to recite it in the qunūt of their prayers so that Allah might relieve them from this calamity.

THE IMAM UNDER STRICT SUPERVISION

The Imam (as) suffered in many different ways because of the Abbasid Caliphs. They surrounded the Imam with spies and policemen to watch him and to observe any follower or companion who approached him. The Abbasid kings spared no effort in oppressing him. They moved him from one prison to another. They subjected him to confinement and imposed an economic blockade on him as well.

THE BRAVERY OF IMAM AL-'ASKARI

One of the Abbasid rulers, al-Musta'in Billah had a wild and uncontrollable horse. Anyone who mounted the horse would be thrown off it and hurt. This ruler wanted to test the Imam (as) by forcing him to ride the horse. He was hoping the horse would hurt or kill the Imam (as). The Imam was aware of the issue with this horse.

When he was asked to mount it, he did not hesitate at all. Without any fear, he approached the horse and mounted it. He began to ride and then tame the horse without any problems. The king was surprised by this and asked for an explanation. The Imam (as) replied:

“We are the Ahlul Bayt of the Messenger, our perfections cannot be compared to others.”

THE IMAM'S MARTYRDOM

Al-Mu'tamid, the Abbasid tyrant, could not bear Imam al-'Askari any longer, for he saw and heard people everywhere glorify the imam and prefer him to all the other notable people of the time. Finally, he made up his mind to assassinate the Imam (as). He killed him by poison, and the Imam (as) spent his last moments in pain in his home, attended by his young holy son, Imam al-Mahdi (atfs).

THE ANTICIPATION OF AL-MAHDI

The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs knew very well about the Prophetic narrations with regards to coming of al-Mahdi (atfs), who would be the twelfth divinely appointed Imam from the progeny of the Prophet (saw) through his daughter Fatima (as). They knew that the narrations indicated that al-Mahdi (atfs) would establish justice and the rule of God on Earth. So like many tyrants before them, they wanted to stop the birth of Imam al-Mahdi, or to imprison or kill him if he was born. For this reason, Imam al-'Askari (as) was kept in isolation and a close watch was kept over him and all his family.

Despite all their efforts though, they could not stop the birth of Imam al-Mahdi (atfs), the ultimate saviour of all humanity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEARING GOD

The distinct aspect in the childhood of Imam al-'Askari (as) was his fear of Allah. He was God-fearing since his early years.

The Fear of Allah and the Punishment of Allah (SWT) is an important sign of a believer. Allah has commanded human beings to fear Him in many verses of the Qur'an.

“Therefore fear not people but fear Me...” (The Holy Qur'an, 5:44)

“Verily! Those who fear their Lord unseen (i.e. they do not see Him, nor His Punishment in the Hereafter, etc.), theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward” (67:12)

A person who fears Allah will not be tempted by the gloss of this world, nor will they be scared of the material threats of this world. This is because before them there is always the awe and fear of Allah (SWT).

FRUITS OF FEARING GOD

- a. **High standing with Allah:** The degree of fear of Allah in someone's heart is a key indicator of his rank with Allah. Because someone who fears Allah can immediately distinguish between right and wrong, they will behave in accordance with what is most pleasing to Allah in everything they do.
- b. **A double share from Allah's mercy:** In the Qur'an Allah promises to all His servants who fear Him and behave cautiously that their lives will be blessed, both worldly and spiritually.

- c. **Acceptable worship:** Those who do not fear Allah every act of their worship there will be the desire to show off or to impress others.
- d. **Ease in one's affairs:** Allah will open the way for them in all their undertakings. Even in the apparently most difficult situations, Allah will eventually show them a way out, and however long their difficulty lasts, they will not be left alone. This is Allah's promise to the believers.

SIGNS OF A PERSON WHO FEARS GOD

- a. **They only fear Allah:** The true believer does not fear anyone or any community other than Allah. He will know that benefit and loss, good and bad can only come from Allah. The following ayah praises exactly such a group of people:

“Those (i.e. believers) unto whom the people (hypocrites) said, "Verily, the people (pagans) have gathered against you (a great army), therefore, fear them." But it (only) increased them in Faith, and they said: "Allah (Alone) is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs (for us)."

In recent years, we have seen soldiers following the path of the Ahlul Bayt who have shown exactly the resolve described above and have been victorious against armies which were much greater and more equipped.

- b. **Strive to please Allah alone:** They will only strive to seek the pleasure of Allah and not the people who in reality do not possess any power or strength. The attitude of Prophet Yūsuf (as) is a very good example. Prophet Yūsuf (as) was able to preserve his chastity against a powerful woman who desired him. Despite all her threats and intrigues, he preferred to go to prison rather than overstep Allah's boundaries.
- c. **They always act conscientiously:** Someone who is profoundly aware of Allah will again be fearfully cautious about doing anything that would displease Him, whether any other human is present or not, because they are aware that Allah will know of any wrongdoing they commit, whether it is done openly or in secret.

Imam al-Şádiq (as) said: “Whoever recognizes God fears Him, and whoever fears God deprives himself from this world.”

- d. **They emulate all the good qualities mentioned in the Qur'an:** A person who fears Allah will display those attitudes that relate to good character such as loyalty, faithfulness, righteousness, honesty and sincerity.
- e. **In every situation they turn to Allah:** When any negative incident happens to them or when they feel their work is going badly, they will immediately examine themselves as to whether or not they have done anything to displease Allah. Through their supplications they will seek and beg forgiveness from Him.

When we look at the conduct of the prophets and true believers, we see that they are all servants who respectfully fear Allah and who strenuously avoid His punishment. However, at the same time, their continuous and consistent praise and exaltation of Allah is an indication of their total love and attachment to Him.

FEARING ONLY ALLAH

- i. **Consequences experienced on Earth:** Allah will make those people who do not fear Him and who are not cautious of Him suffer both physical and spiritual distress in this world. In reality their lives will be reduced to one long series of physical and emotional disasters.
“God will make everything fear the one fears God, and will make the one who does not fear God, fear everything.”
- ii. **Situation in the Hereafter:** Those people who did not fear Allah whilst on Earth, so in the Hereafter He will subject them to fears the like of which they have never experienced or been faced with, they will be surrounded by fear, terror, and stress forever.

Excruciating physical pain on the one hand, and unbearable spiritual agony on the other, will torture these victims. They will be constantly ill-treated, disgraced, degraded and belittled

COWARDICE AND BRAVERY

ⁱCowardice is the opposite of courage. Fear is of two kinds. Firstly, there is the fear of God and fear of sins and Divine punishment. Secondly, there is the fear of things other than God. The first kind of fear is praiseworthy, and leads man to perfection, whereas the second kind of fear is an undesirable vice brought about by the disease of cowardice.

Cowardice has its roots in fearing other than Allah. We should train ourselves to fear only Allah (SWT), so that we can be truly brave and not fear others besides God.

Imam 'Ali (AS) said: "Cowardice, greed, and miserliness are vile traits that come together as a result of distrust in Allah."ⁱⁱ

Therefore, according to this, the true definition of bravery is to face up to our perceived fears of things other than Allah (SWT). True bravery is when a person always does what pleases Allah (SWT), no matter who else that might displease.

Review Questions

Q1. How long did Imam al-'Askari (as) live?

- a. Twenty three years
- b. Sixty four years
- c. Twenty eight years

Q2. What is Cowardice?

- a. Bullying people
- b. Being fearful, in action, of other than Allah (SWT)
- c. Being strong

Q3. What is one of the signs of someone who fears God?

- a. Likes to show off
- b. Acting conscientiously
- c. Being a coward

ⁱ <http://www.al-islam.org/kaaba14/14.htm>
<http://www.al-islam.org/akhlaq-aimma/9.htm>
http://www.maaref-foundation.com/english/library/pro_ahl/imam11_askari/the_life_of_imam_askari/index.htm
http://harunyahya.com/en/books/2546/Fear_Of_Allah/chapter/1666
<http://harunyahya.com/en/works/25234/fear-of-allah-and-hell>
Mishkatul Anwar- search through Google- chapter on FEAR and HOPE
Mizanul Hikmah- chapters on FEAR and COWARDICE
http://www.darolhadith.com/modules.php?name=my_AlfabetMenu&vid=127&scid=1
SML Lectures:

Imam Askari

ⁱⁱ [Ghurur al-Hikam, no. 1837]