



IMAM AL-BĀQIR ^[A.S.]

امام الباقر (ع)

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Students should get a brief overview of the historical context in which the Imam (as) lived
- Students should gain an insight into the importance of seeking Islamic knowledge
- Students should gain an insight into some of the principles of seeking knowledge according to the teachings of Islam

Imam al-Bāqir (as)

In previous years, you have learnt some basic facts about the life of Imam al-Bāqir (as), as well as the importance he gave to acquiring and passing on knowledge. In this lesson we will continue that theme by discussing the importance of gaining Islamic knowledge, and how Islamic and ‘secular’ knowledge interact.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE IMAM (AS)

Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (as) lived in a unique time in Islamic history. In the generations before his Imamate, the Muslims were ruled by the oppressive Umayyad regime, which did not allow the Imams to teach Islam as it was supposed to be taught and basically gave them no freedom. However, the time of Imam Bāqir’s imamate coincided with the weakening of the Umayyad rule and its eventual destruction. Because the Umayyad family was busy fighting for power, the Imam (as) had more freedom than many of the other Imams.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

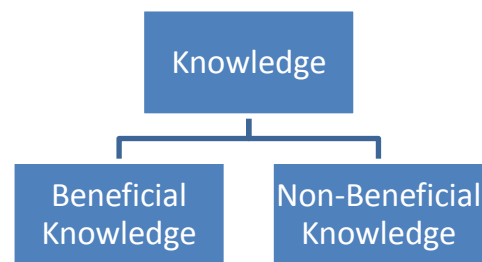
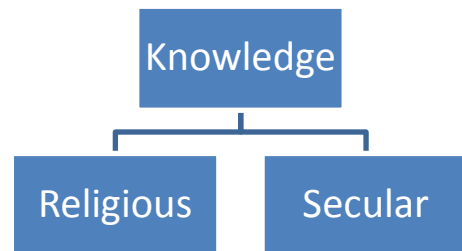
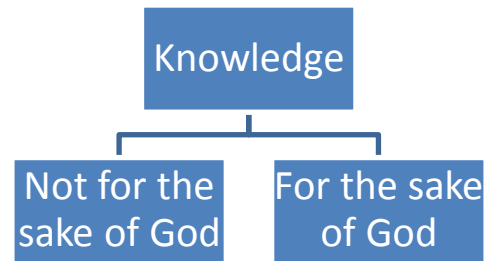
He used this freedom to pass on the true teachings of Islam. According to some narrations, he had over 8000 students in various fields. He passed on a great amount of valuable knowledge, and it is perhaps for this reason that his grandfather the Prophet (saw) gave him the title of ‘al-Bāqir’, meaning ‘the one who splits knowledge’. Imam al-Bāqir (as) put a lot of emphasis on the importance of gaining knowledge, to the extent that he said:

“If I come across any Shī‘i youth who is not gaining knowledge of his religion, I would strike him painfully.”ⁱ

THE IMPORTANCE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

In previous years, you have learnt about the importance of seeking knowledge and pursuing a career that would benefit society. This year, we will be specifically discussing the importance of gaining Islamic knowledge, and some of the reasons why gaining a solid foundation in Islamic knowledge is so important. Perhaps the first reason is that whichever science we learn, we will always have the capacity to use it for good or evil. Therefore, learning a science in itself is not so virtuous. It is putting that science to good use that is truly virtuous. In order to know how to put our knowledge to good use, it is essential that we have a solid foundation of Islamic knowledge. It is this Islamic knowledge which will help us gain the real benefits and rewards of the other sciences we have learnt. Imam al-Bāqir (as) reminds us of this fact when he says:

“The knowledgeable man who is beneficial to others as a result of his knowledge is better than seventy thousand worshippers.”ⁱⁱ



THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Knowing about the fundamentals of our faith gives meaning to all our actions and purpose to our life. This is perhaps why the Prophet (saw) says:

“A little knowledge is better than a lot of worship.”ⁱⁱⁱ

JURISPRUDENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

The laws of jurisprudence are there to regulate our life and help us reach our perfection in the fastest way possible. Knowledge of these rules is so essential that Imam al-Ṣadiq (as) tells us:

“Hasten towards gaining knowledge, for by the one in whose hands is my soul, one narration about halaal and haraam which you may take from a truthful person is better for you than the entire world and all the gold and silver it contains.”^{iv}

ETHICAL KNOWLEDGE

Although knowledge of how we should treat one another in society is inherent to all of us, sometimes we need to be alerted to this or reminded of it. Therefore, learning about the ethical teachings of Islam is essential, because it is the way in which we can improve our personalities and be beneficial to our societies.

TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE: AN ISLAMIC CATEGORISATION

Read the following two narrations then see which of the above three categorisations is correct

“He who gains knowledge for the sake of Allah, acts upon it for the sake of Allah and teaches it for the sake of Allah is called great in the kingdom of the heavens...”^v

One day, the Prophet (saw) walked into the mosque and saw a group of people gathered around a man whom they were calling a scholar. The Prophet asked about the man’s field of expertise. They said that the man was an expert in Arab ancestry, history and poetry. The Prophet (saw) said:

“this knowledge neither harms the one who does not know it, nor benefits the one who knows it.”^{vi}

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE

Of all the sciences we may learn, it is perhaps the Islamic sciences which we should work hardest to put into practice. According to Islamic teachings, knowledge without practice is considered a ‘betrayal’, a reason for entering the Hell-fire and a ‘curse’. We should try to keep a check on ourselves, and examine whether we are putting the knowledge we gain into practice. This self-

examination should occur frequently during our journey of learning.

STRIVING TO ATTAIN KNOWLEDGE

Seeking knowledge is often not easy and requires long nights, sacrifices and a lot of self-discipline. In fact, Imam ‘Ali (as) says that:

“acquiring knowledge is not possible while the body (person) is tranquil.”^{vii}

The Prophet (saw) encourages us to tackle these difficulties, even encouraging us to travel as far as China in order to seek knowledge.

AVICENNA: A WELL-ROUNDED SCHOLAR

Avicenna (or Ibn Sina) was a scholar born in Persia, who managed to excel in many fields of both religious and natural sciences. He was a doctor, a polymath (an expert in various areas of maths), a physicist, a chemist and an astronomer. At the same time, he was an expert in philosophy and theology, and his textbooks in these fields are studied till today. The amazing thing about Avicenna was that he was a pioneer in each of the fields he took up. He was a famous and brilliant physician and he revolutionised the sciences of philosophy and theology. He was a great example of how one can bring together religious and ‘secular’ knowledge. The following story shows us perhaps why he was so successful.

When Avicenna was young, he was already known for his amazing intellect. He had memorised the Qur’an by age 10, and was already studying mathematics, medicine and jurisprudence. He then began to study philosophy, and he found this more difficult. Each time he was faced with something he did not understand he would perform ablution, go to the mosque and pray until he found the solution. There was one book in particular which he could not understand. It was called the ‘Metaphysics of



Aristotle’. He was so determined to understand this book that it is said he read it forty times over. He would dream about this book, and he had memorised all its words. However, he still could not understand it. One day, he was walking past a bookstall when he found a book for the value of three dirhams, which was supposed to be an explanation of the ‘Metaphysics of Aristotle’. This book was the commentary of al-Farabi. He bought the book and once he read it, he understood everything in the ‘Metaphysics of Aristotle’. This made Avicenna very happy and he hurried back to the mosque to offer thanks to Allah, the Great, by praying and giving charity to the poor.

This story shows firstly that Avicenna saw his scientific pursuits as part of his worship and journey towards Allah, the Exalted. It also shows his amazing persistence when he faced ^{viii}difficulties on the path of attaining knowledge.

Class Activity

- Your homework for this week is to take time to make a 5-year plan for your Islamic studies in the near future. When making your plan, consider the following:
- What books would you like to read or which lecture series would you like to listen to?
- Which fields or specific topics within Islamic study are you most interested in?
- Have you considered formal study programs such as the e-hawza or courses that can be done by correspondence over the internet?
- Do you have hopes to be a teacher of Islamic studies in the future?

Practice Questions

1. What was the name of the oppressive dynasty which ruled at the time of Imam Bāqir’s childhood?
2. List three benefits of gaining Islamic knowledge.

ⁱ (*Miskhātul Anwār*, no. 685)

ⁱⁱ (*Mizānul Ḥikmah*, no. 4471)

ⁱⁱⁱ (*Mizānul Ḥikmah*, 4464)

^{iv} (*Miskhātul Anwār*, no. 682)

^v (*Imam al-Ṣadiq, Mizānul Ḥikmah*, no. 4505)

^{vi} (*Miskhātul Anwār*, no. 708)

^{vii} (*Ghurarul Ḥikam*, p. 348)

^{viii} Bibliography

1. *Miskhātul Anwār*, Section 3, Chapter
2. *Mizānul Ḥikmah*, Section 288
3. eHAWZA, Semester 1, Course 2, lecture 9
4. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avicenna>