



IMAM ALJAWAD (a.s)

امام الجواد (ع)

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand some basic biographical facts about the Imam (as)
- Understand the aspects of the Imam's (as) generosity
- Review some of the Imam's (as) brief teachings

Muhammad ibn 'Alī, the 9th Imam, sometimes called Abu Ja'far was known as al-Jawād (The Generous) and al-Taqī (the Pious). After his father Imam Ali Reḍā's (as) demise, the Abbasid Caliph, al-Ma'mun, summoned Imam al-Jawād (as) (who was then residing in Medina) to Khurasan in Iran. He later forced the Imam (as) to marry his al-Ma'mun's daughter. Later on, Imam al-Jawād (as) was allowed to return to Medina, devoting his life to teaching. After al-Ma'mun's death, however, he was summoned to Baghdad again, and according to most accounts was poisoned by his wife, the daughter of al-Ma'mun, by the evil plots of new caliph al-Mu'tasim. Dying at the age of 25, Imam Jawad (as) had the shortest life out of all of the Imams (as).

THE IMAM'S EARLY MATURITY

Imam Jawad (as) was only 9 years old when he lost his father, Imam al-Reḍā (as). It is Allah's (SWT) decree that this world shall never be left without a divine leader. Thus, Imam al-Jawād (as) (as) took his position of Divine leadership at the age of 9 years. The Shi'a at the time could not help asking whether a child at that age could take on such a responsibility. Imam al-Reḍā (as) in response to them used to illustrate the story of Jesus who was even younger when he had become the prophet of his time.

A companion of the Imam (as) says that he was looking at the Imam (as) closely so that he could describe him to the believers in his home land of Egypt. While he was doing this, the Imam sat down and said:

“O Ali, God has appointed Imams as proofs, just as He appointed prophets as proofs, when he said: ‘and We gave Him wisdom while he was a boy’, ‘and when he reached maturity’ and ‘when he reached forty years’. Therefore it is possible for wisdom to be granted to one while he is still a boy, as it is possible for it to be granted when he is forty”

The following narration beautifully describes a scene from the life of the Imam (as):

Muḥammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawād was brought to the Mosque of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) after the martyrdom of his father (peace be upon him). He was (still) a child. He went to the pulpit and ascended the first step of it. He then said: “I am Muḥammad, the son of 'Ali al-Reḍā, I am al-Jawād (the Magnanimous). I am the one who knows the lineage of people in their loins; I am the most knowledgeable of both your secrets and your apparent affairs, and where you will end up. This is knowledge that was granted to us by the Creator of all of creation...if it was not for the dominance of the people of falsehood, and the governance of the people of misguidance, and the attacks of the people of doubt, I would have said words that the first and last of the people would have been amazed at”.

In previous years we discussed the stories of the first encounter that Imam al-Jawād (as) had with Ma'mun and also the story of Imam's contest with the most knowledgeable authority then, namely Yahya ibn Aakhtam. Both these stories exemplified the divinely granted abilities of the Imam while he was still young. ⁱ

POLITICAL SITUATION

Throughout the lives of the Ahlul Bayt, they had always met with strong opposition from the tyrannical rulers of their time. The period of Imam al-Jawād (as) was no different. The Abbasid ruler at the time was al-Ma'mun, who was succeeded by his brother al-Mu'tasim. Al-Ma'mun, unlike his successor had a softer approach towards them Imam. This was not because he loved the Imam but instead so that he could use the popularity of the Imam for his own selfish and political interests. al-Ma'mun, despite his cunning, was aware that the family of the Prophet had a special type of knowledge which should be appreciated and be known to other people as long as power remained in his hands and his authority remained supreme.

He began a policy of reconciliation with the Abbasid elders and also with those who had inclinations towards the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet in order to attract more popularity himself. There was freedom of speech and expression which resulted in open discussions on main issues which were previously considered taboo. Al-Ma'mun encouraged the intellectuals to engage in open discussions about the concept of power and authority.

On the other hand, al-Mu'tasim was extremely jealous of Imam al-Jawād (as) due to his popularity amongst the community. When he took power, he immediately summoned Imam al-Jawād (as) to Baghdad. Here he plotted to kill the Imam and eventually was able to influence the wife of Imam to poison him.

CHARACTER AND VIRTUES

The members of the Ahlul bayt (as) were the perfect manifestations of the Divine attributes of Allah (SWT). Imam Muḥammad ibn 'Alī was famously known as al-Jawād (the Generous) – one of the divine attributes-because of his open-handedness towards people. Let us remind ourselves of one example of the Imam's generosity which we came across in previous years:

Despite the tyrannical and oppressive nature of the Abbasid regime, the Imam did what he could to help his companions in both simple and complex matters. A man from Sajistan accompanied the Imam (as) on a journey to Ḥajj. While on the journey the man said that the governor of his state claimed to be a follower and lover of the Ahlul Bayt. He asked the Imam: 'may I be sacrificed for you, if you see it fit, would you write to him

to treat me well?' The Imam (as), wanting to disassociate himself from an unjust governor, said: 'I do not know him.' The companion persisted in his request though and so the Imam wrote to this governor:

"In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. The one who is carrying my letter to you has said that you have a beautiful belief. Be aware, that only your good actions will remain with you, so be good to your brothers and know that Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, will ask you about even the weight of an atom and a seed..."

As this man was returning home with the letter, the governor became aware of it, so he went out of the city to meet the man, kissed the letter of the Imam, considered it an honour, and gave this man whatever he wanted.

The Imam was also generous and kind when it came to the emotions of his followers. He was attentive to their feelings and made them feel better in times of affliction and hardship. When a companion of his lost his young son, the Imam (as) wrote to him:

"I heard of the affliction of the death of your son 'Ali, and I remembered that he was the most beloved of your sons to you. Thus does Allah, the Exalted, take from a believer's children and property the best among them, so that he can increase the reward of the afflicted believer. May Allah increase your reward, and make good your grief, and strengthen your heart, for He is the Powerful. May Allah soon grant you another child..."

GENEROSITY

Generosity is a very lofty characteristic that everyone should aspire and work hard to develop. It involves giving all forms of whatever one possesses in terms of wealth, time and knowledge to those who are in need of it. The opposite of being generous is to be stingy.

DIMENSIONS OF GENEROSITY

Generosity can be practiced in almost every area of our lives. Here, we focus on material generosity- that is: giving from our possessions and time or expertise for the goodness or benefit of others.

Examples include:

- Giving money or food to someone in need. Our generosity is greater if we give despite being in need ourselves

- Inviting guests to our home for a meal and a pleasant gathering. This can increase love among the believers
- Giving a good loan to a friend who needs money to start a business or who is going through hard times. A good loan means we do not ask them for anything in return (e.g. interest) or hold our favour over them to make them feel bad
- Donating to charitable causes. These causes may include:
 - Orphanages
 - Organisations that help the poor and needy
 - Mosques and Islamic centres
 - Islamic schools and other organisations promoting the Truth of Islam
- Giving up our time and effort to help any of the above causes

Class Discussion

Discuss among your class, and come up with a list of good causes which may be deserving of our generosity.

COMPLETING OUR GENEROSITY

There are certain things that make our generosity complete. These include:

- Giving even during the time of difficulty,
- Giving without expecting any reward in return,
- Belittling the act
- Giving secretly

Imam Ali (as) said: “The best form of generosity is that expressed in spite of hardship”ⁱⁱ

The Imams of the Ahlul Bayt were habituated to going outside in the later parts of the night with a sack full of bread, meat and money. They used to carry it on the back of their necks and take it those in need. Only after they passed away did people know that it was the Imam of the time who was being so generous and charitable toward them. Imam al-Jawād (as) was the crystallisation of this lofty virtue.

MERITS OF BEING GENEROUS

- One of the best merits of being generous is it totally purges the soul off the destructive characteristic of stinginess. Stinginess can only be removed by habituating the self to giving away wealth or whatever one is attached to. A person will be purified in proportion of how much wealth he gives away and in

proportion to his happiness at spending it for the sake of Allah (SWT).

- The other merit of generosity is it causes people to love the one who is generous and they begin to enjoy his company:

“Man’s open-handedness endears him (causes him to be loved) to his opponents, and his stinginess, makes him hated even by his children”ⁱⁱⁱ

- Being generous is the best form of gratitude for the blessings of Allah (SWT). How vile is a person who looks upon a poor person – seeing how tough his circumstances are and how the poor person is even needier than himself – and does not allow himself to exercise thankfulness to Allah (SWT) for making him needless of begging.

MODERATION IN GENEROSITY

It is also very important that we do not go to either extreme. So while we should not be stingy, we should also not spend everything we have on others and be left with nothing ourselves. The Holy Qur’an instructs the Prophet (saw) on this:

“And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty”^{iv}

Review Questions:

Q1. The Imam (as) took his position at the age of nine years. When asked about this, he answered by:

- a. Showing that his knowledge was Divinely given and superior to that of others
- b. Proving to people that God can and does appoint representatives at a very young age
- c. Both a & b
- d. Neither a nor b

Q2. Explain in your own words a proof from the Holy Qur’an about why a representative of God can be a child.

Q3. How did Imam al-Jawād (as) (and his grandfather) come to be buried in Baghdad, Iraq, when the Ahlul Bayt (as) are originally from Medina?

ⁱ Refer to Level 4 lesson on Imam Jawad for the details of the stories.

ⁱⁱ Ghurarul Hikam no.3850

ⁱⁱⁱ Al Nawadir Al Rawandi Pg 130, no 183

^{iv} Holy Qur’an (17:29)