

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 3

Imam al-'Askari (as)

Imam al-'Askari (as) is the eleventh divinely appointed Imam and successor of the Holy Prophet. He was born in Medina in the month of Rabi'ul Thāni 232 AH. He was the son of our 10th Holy Imam, Imam al-Hādi (as). Imam al-'Askari was 28 years of age at the time of his father's death and his Imamat lasted only six years.

The Imam (as) spent most of his life in the town of Samarrā', in the north of Iraq. This was the town where the kings of the time lived, and this town was like a military camp, because a great number of soldiers lived there. The soldiers protected the king and also kept people under surveillance. Among the people who the Imam's soldiers and spies continuously kept an eye on were the Imams (as)- Imam al-Hādi (as) and Imam al-'Askari. Because the Imam spent most of his life in this town, which was known as "al-'Askar" (meaning military camp), he was given the title al-'Askari.

Despite this the Holy Imam ensured that he delivered the true message of Allah (SWT) and the Holy Prophet (saw). He taught the Holy Qur'an and taught us a lot about the meanings of the Holy Qur'an.

There were also many times when Imam al-'Askari (as) was taken to Baghdad by the authorities of the time, where he was questioned and imprisoned. During his life, he spent much of his time with people who did not believe in God and taught them about God's Existence and Mercy. When he was imprisoned, he was given the most ruthless jailors to supervise him. Such was the piety and submission of the Imam to Allah (SWT) even the most ruthless of jailors could not bring themselves to harm him.

They saw him in constant worship and daily fasting – totally devoted to Allah (SWT). They wanted to be like him and worship Allah.

Imam al-'Askari was martyred when he was only 28 years of age. In fact if we look at the lives of our Imams under the later Abbasid Caliphs, we see that none of them lived for very long. The Caliphs were well aware that Imam al-'Askari was the 11th Imam and there were to be twelve. They knew that the 12th Imam, known as al-Mahdi, was to come and overthrow the oppressive tyrants, and this made them afraid of the Imams (as). They wanted to prevent al-Mahdi (as) from being born so they attempted on several occasions to kill him. Imam al-'Askari was eventually killed by poison which had been mixed in fruit. He was left to die in his home. However, the tyrants could not stop the birth of his only son, Imam al-Mahdi (atfs).

He died on 8th Rabi'ul 'Awwal 260 AH and is buried where he lived in Samarra', by the side of his father. His son, our present Imam (as), performed the funeral prayer for his father before disappearing and beginning his Minor Occultation.

In this lesson we will learn about how Imam al-'Askari (as) was a true role model of "fearing none but Allah" and how we can learn from this to benefit us in our life.

IMAM AL-'ASKARI: THE GOD- FEARING IMAM

One day a man passed by Imam al-'Askari (as) who was a child at the time and saw him cry while he was with other children. The man thought that this child cried for the toys in the children's hands and that he could not participate in their playing. The man told the child that he would buy him what he might play with.

The Imam replied:

"No! We have not been created for play."

The man was astonished and said, 'Then, what have we been created for?'

The child said:

"For knowledge and worship"

The man was again astonished by this reply from such a small child, so he asked, 'Where have you got this from?'

The child said:

"From this saying of Allah: 'Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you would not be brought back to Us?'"ⁱ

The man was astonished and confused. He said to the child: 'What has happened to you while you are still a guiltless little child? You still haven't told me why you are crying.'

The Imam (as) said:

"I have seen my mother set fire to big pieces of firewood, but fire is not lit except with small pieces. I am young and small, so must be more prone to being deceived by the Satan and I fear that I shall be from the small pieces of the firewood of Hell."

WHY SHOULD WE FEAR ALLAH?

Fearing Allah (SWT) was one of the distinguishing features of Imam al-'Askari (as). He feared none but Allah and continued to do so right up to his death.

We need to follow the example of Imam al-'Askari and be "God fearing". We need to remind ourselves that Allah (SWT) will punish us for anything we do to disobey Him. Just the same as when we have done something wrong at home, there will be consequences for our behaviour.

A good reminder for us is from a narration from Imam al-Şadiq (as) when he says:

"Fear Allah as if you can see Him before you. If you cannot see Him before you, then surely He can see you. If you think He cannot see you then you disbelieve Him. If you realise He can see you and yet you commit acts of disobedience to Him, then you consider Him as the humblest among those who you can see."

We need to make sure that we never forget that Allah (SWT) is watching us and all our actions. We should fear the consequences that Allah (SWT) has set for sins, and this should stop us from committing sins.

THROUGH FEAR COMES HOPE

As a true believer, we need to fear Allah (SWT) and His punishment, but we also need to be hopeful for His forgiveness and rewards. We need to make sure we try very hard to stay away from things that cause us to sin and disobey Allah (SWT) and work hard at things that will make Him pleased with us.

Like everything in life, we need to have fear and hope in controlled amounts. Too much fear is bad for us. It causes us to lose hope and despair. This can lead us to commit more sin and turn further away from Allah (SWT). We need to have just enough fear that reminds us of what Allah (SWT) has commanded us to do.

FEARING ONLY ALLAH (SWT)

God always takes care of his creation. We only have to trust Him fully.

We have many examples set by Prophets who feared no one other than Allah (SWT). For example, Prophet Moses (as) was a poor shepherd when he faced up to the great tyrant of his time, Pharaoh. He stood up to the power and armies of Pharaoh while he only had a handful of supporters. Eventually, with the help of God, he overcame Pharaoh and completed his mission. He feared none but God, and because of this, God gave him success.

For this reason, we should never disobey God because we are scared of someone else. If we are afraid that our friends will tease us or make fun of us if we pray at lunchtime or eat only ḥalāl food, and this stops us from doing these things, then we are more fearful of our friends than we are of Allah (SWT). If we take this path, we will not be successful in our life.

Allah (SWT) has promised people who fear only Him that everything and everyone on Earth will fear those people. He has also promised those people who disobey Allah (SWT) and do not fear Him, that they will be hated by the creatures of Allah (SWT) and will not be successful.

Review Questions

Q1. Our 11th Holy Imam was known as al-'Askari (as) because:

- He was a soldier
- He lived in a town under military rule
- He was pious and God-fearing

Q2. We should fear Allah (SWT) because:

- We must obey Him otherwise He will punish us
- It nourishes our soul and keeps us on the straight path towards Allah (SWT)
- All of the above

Q3. Imam al-'Askari was kept under constant surveillance because:

- The Abbasid rulers wanted to prevent him from having a son who would become the 12th Imam
- He was plotting to overthrow the government
- Neither of the above

ⁱ Holy Quran 23:115