



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

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 Imamatus was six years
- Being a resident of ‘Askar, a suburb of the city of Samarrā’, he was given the title of al-‘Askari

IMAM AL –‘ASKARI (AS)

Imam al-‘Askari lived during the time of the rule of the Abbasid family. During the life of the Imam, there was a lot of turmoil in the Muslim world because of the oppressive nature of the Abbasids.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

These tyrant kings had brought Turkish advisors and mercenaries to help them in their unjust ways. These Turkish mercenaries were so cruel to the Muslim civilians that this led to a number of uprisings. These uprisings forced the Abbasid leadership to relocate from Baghdad to Samarrā’. As the government moved, it sought to keep any potential opposition to it close by, and thus it summoned Imam al-Hādi (as) and Imam al-‘Askari (as) there.

There was also a ‘slave rebellion’ during this time which according to some historians lasted 14 years. The African slaves, who were badly mistreated by this government, staged an uprising. While the Imam (as) did not oppose this revolution, he did not support it either. The Muslim community in general lived in a state of oppression and poverty.

Even within the Abbasid family there was a lot of conflict, and leaders changed quickly. During the life of the Imam (as), al-Mu‘tazz ruled for four years, and after him al-Muhtadi for two, before al-Mu‘tamid took power for about 25 years.

THE IMAMAT

During this tumultuous period, Imam al-‘Askari’s Imamatus lasted about 7 years, from the years 254-260 AH. He took the role of Imamatus after the martyrdom of his father when he was 20 years old, and died at the age of 26.

The Imam was not able to communicate with his companions openly. Communication had to be secret. One companion narrates that one day he and other companions were waiting in the city of Samarrā’ to see the Imam as he was going on his way to the king’s palace. Suddenly a message came from the Imam through a

secret messenger: “no one should greet me, no one should point to me, and no one should give any sign towards me, for otherwise your lives would not be safe.”

Another issue the Imam had to contend with was the presence of his brother, who was known as Ja'far al-Kadhhab (Ja'far the Liar). Despite being the son of Imam al-Hadi, this man was a shameless liar who on many occasions claimed to be the Imam. However, he was such a pathetic person that even the tyrant rulers of the time did not put any trust in him and threw him out.

On one occasion, Ja'far approached the king al-Mu'tamid and asked him to appoint him as the Imam in place of his brother. Amazingly, al-Mu'tamid said to him: “Know that the status of your brother (Imam al-'Askari) was not from us, but from God. We tried to reduce his status, but God only wished to raise his status further....if you have such a status among the Shi'ah, then you do not need us, and if you do not have such a status, and you do not have the qualities your brother has, we will not be able to help you gain such a status.”

IMPRISONMENT

As with many other Imams, Imam al-'Askari was imprisoned by the 'Abbasid tyrants.

As with other Imams, Imam al-'Askari also had a great effect on his jailors. A minister of the Abbasids put his two most ruthless jailors in charge of the Imam (as). However, the effect of the Imam (as) on them was amazing: “they have become amazing in their worship and virtuousness. They lower their cheeks to him.” He called upon them and blamed them for their softness, to which they replied: “what can we say about a man who stays up the whole night and fasts the whole day. He is not occupied by anything other than worship. When we look at him, our joints shake, and something uncontrollable.

THE DECLARATION OF IMAM AL-MAHDI

One of the main tasks of Imam al-'Askari was to declare the Imamate of his son, Imam al-Mahdi after him. He did this on a number of occasions. It was always done in private, among the most trusted and selected Shi'ah of the Ahlul Bayt (as). One such statement is below:

“This is your Imam after me and my Caliph over you. Obey him and do not separate after me because then you will perish when it comes to your religion. Surely, you

will not see him after this day until he is much older, so accept what Uthman (his deputy) says and follow his command and accept his opinion because he is the Caliph of your Imam and the rule is with him.”

HIS FINAL ILLNESS AND MARTYRDOM

Imam al-'Askari was poisoned and became ill, an illness that led to his death. Just before his death, he called his son, al-Mahdi, and asked him to give him some water. He then told him he would be the next Imam, and that he was a master among his Ahlul Bayt (as). After this, Imam al-'Askari passed away. Imam al-Mahdi led his funeral prayers and took up the leadership after him.

When (Imam) al-Hasan (al-Askari) saw him (his son) he wept and said: “O the One who is the Master of his Ahlul Bayt, give me water, so for I am going to my Lord” (Ghaybatul Tusi, p. 165)

WORDS OF ADVICE

“How detestable it is for a believer that he has a desire which belittles him.”

“There is no affliction except that there is with Allah a blessing that encompasses it.”

“No honourable person leaves truth except that he will be humiliated, and no base person takes up truth unless he will become honourable.”

“You are living in a determined time which is becoming shorter. Your days are numbered, and death comes all of a sudden. He who plants good will harvest that which people will envy him for, and he who plants evil will harvest regret. Everyone will reap what they sow. A slow person will not overtake because of his luck, nor will an anxious person get what was not prescribed for him.

Whoever is given good, it is God who gave that goodness, and whoever is protected from evil, it is God who protected that person.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEARING GOD

One of the main characteristics of Imam al-'Askari was his fear of God. 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-Şādiq (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.

Review Questions

1. Do some research into the history of the Abbasid dynasty? What were the features of their rule
2. How have our Imams approached situations where there are uprisings against unjust rulers? What has been the approach of the Imams when these uprisings have been misguided or not well planned?