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Lesson 48: The Eleventh Imam (Hasan bin 'Ali)

Name: Hasan bin 'Ali.

Agnomen: Abu Muhammad.

Title: Al-'Askari.

Father: 'Ali an-Naqi.

Mother: Hudaytha (also known as Susan).

Birth: 10th Rabi II, 232 AH in Samarra, Iraq.

Death: 8th Rabi I, 260 AH in Samarra, Iraq.

1. Birth & Early Years

Imam Hasan al-'Askari was born in the year 232 A.H. in Samarra, Iraq during the tenth Imam's stay in that city. "Al-'Askari" is from al-'askar which means "the army". Our eleventh Imam is known as al-'Askari because he lived in al-'Askar neighbourhood which was the military garrison of the Turkish troops of the 'Abbasids.

His imamate began at the age of twentytwo, and continued for just six years when he was poisoned in 260 A.H.

2. Political Circumstances of His Imamate

The short period of Imam al-'Askari's imamate coincided with the caliphate of Mu'tazz, Muhtadi and Mu'tamid.

Mu'tazz is the same caliph during whose reign Imam 'Ali an-Naqi was martyred. More than seventy members of the Hashimites were arrested on his orders and brought from Hijaz to Samarra. The Shi'as were truly suffering under the tyranny of Mu'tazz; but soon he was deposed from his caliphate by the Turkish troops.

Muhtadi assumed the pretence of a pious caliph, forbade the presence of female singers in the court

and even fixed a time to hear the grievances of the people. But when it came to the Shi'as and their Imam, he was no different from the other rulers. Imam Hasan al-'Askari was even imprisoned for a short while during Muhtadi's caliphate. But even Muhtadi's rule was ended by the Turkish troops who rebelled against him and killed him.

Mu'tamid led a promiscuous lifestyle and left the management of the state to his brother Muwaffaq. After the death of Muwaffaq, the control of the state came into the hands of his son, Mu'tazid who succeeded his uncle, Mu'tamid, in the year 279 A.H.

Mu'tamid's reign was full of civil strife and tyranny; thousands of people were killed, especially the descendants of Imam 'Ali (a.s.) whose bodies were mutilated. Imam Hasan al-'Askari was put in the prison of Nahrir who used to mistreat the Imam in whatever way he could.

3. The Miracle of Rain

Once there was a severe famine in Samarra. Mu'tamid ordered the people to organize a salat known as *salatu 'l-istisqā'* (the prayer for rain). For three days, people went outside the city to take part in the istisqā' prayer but there was no sign of any rain. On the fourth day, the Christian high priest went to the desert and prayed for rain; and lo! heavy rain started to fall. The same thing was repeated the next day.

The Muslims were surprised; doubts started occurring in their minds about the truth of Islam vis-a-vis Christianity. Mu'tamid realized the danger and ordered that Imam Hasan al-'Askari be brought from the prison. After explaining his problem, the caliph asked the Shi'a Imam to rescue Islam!

The Imam said, "Ask the Christian priests and monks to go to the desert tomorrow on Tuesday."

Caliph: "Enough rain has come; so why should we ask them to go to the desert tomorrow?"

The Imam: "So that I may dispell the doubt by the will of God."

The caliph issued the order. The priests and the monks gathered in the desert, and the Imam and Muslims also were present there. The Christians lifted their hands in prayer for rain; the sky became cloudy and rain started to fall.

Imam al-'Askari pointed at one of the monks and ordered the soldiers to take whatever they found in his hand. They discovered that the monk was holding a piece of human bone in his hand. The Imam placed that bone in a piece of cloth and covered it. Then he asked the priests and the monks to pray again. But this time there was no sign of any cloud or rain!

Everyone was surprised at this turn of events. The caliph asked the Imam: "What bone is this?"

The Imam (a.s.): "This is a bone of one of the prophets of God which they have taken from his grave; and one of the miracles of a prophet's bone is that whenever it is exposed from the grave, it will start to rain."

The caliph's people examined the bone and found that what our Imam was saying was the truth. Thus, a descendant of 'Ali and Fātima, rescued the *ummah* of his grandfather from the enemies of Islam!

4. Ishāq al-Kindi & the Qur'ān

Ishāq al-Kindi was a famous philosopher known for materialistic views about the world and religion. Once he started writing a book in which he intended to show the contradictions in the holy Qur'ān.

One day, some students of his came to visit Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.). The Imam: "Isn't there anyone among you who can stop your teacher from such a useless task?"

The student: "We are his students; how can we stop him from what he is doing?"

The Imam: "Are you prepared to convey to him the argument that I would teach you?"

The students: "Yes, of course."

The Imam: "Be courteous towards him and gain his confidence. Then tell him that you have a question about his work. When he permits you to ask the question, say: 'If the Writer of the Qur'ān comes to you; is there a possibility that what He intends by His words was different from what you have understood?'

"He [i.e., Ishāq Kindi] will obviously say, 'Yes, it is quite possible.' Then you should say, 'With that possibility in mind, how can you be sure that what you have understood from the Qur'ān is really the intent of the of the Qur'ān? Isn't it possible that the Writer of the Qur'ān means something different from what you have understood?'"

Having learnt this argument from the Imam, the students went to al-Kindi. At the right moment, one of the students present the argument they had learnt from Imam al-'Askari (a.s.). Ishāq al-Kindi asked the student to repeat the question. After thinking for a while, al-Kindi replied, "What you say is quite possible."

Ishāq al-Kindi knew the intellectual level of his students. So he asked, "How did this idea come to you?"

The student: "It just came to my mind, and so I asked you."

Al-Kindi: "You are incapable to get such ideas; now, tell me the truth where did you get this idea?"

The student: "Abu Muhammad (al-'Askari) has taught us this."

Al-Kindi: "Now you have uttered the truth. Such ideas cannot emerge from anywhere but that family!"

Then al-Kindi got rid of whatever he had written on the contradictions in the Qur'ān.

5. Imam's Letter to Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummi

'Ali bin Husayn bin Bābawayh al-Qummi, the father of the famous scholar Shaykh Sadāq, was a prominent scholar of his time. Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) sent a letter which is enough to show his honour and dignity in the eyes of the Ahlul Bayt. After the preliminary text about praising Allāh and the Prophet, the Imam wrote:

“...O respected and reliable Shaykh, and O faqih (jurist) of my followers, Abul Hasan ‘Ali bin Husayn al-Qummi, may Allāh bless you with what He pleases and may He bring forth worthy sons from you.

“I advise you to fear [displeasing] Allāh, to establish prayer and pay alms—because the prayer of one who does not pay alms is not accepted. I advise you to forgive the mistakes of others and control your anger, and to be kind and generous to your relatives, and to be helpful and concerned for your brethren, and to be patient in response to the deeds of the ignorant people.

“[I advise you] to be learned in religion, steadfast in your work, familiar with the Qur’an, and to acquire the noble character, bid the good and forbid the evil. Allāh, the Almighty, says: ‘There is no use in much of your whispering except [in case of] one who recommends [others] to give charity or do good deeds or make peace between people.’

“Refrain from all bad deeds; and be diligent about the night vigil prayer (*namāz-e shab/salātul layl*) because the Prophet (s.a.w.) recommended it to ‘Ali (a.s.) and said, ‘O ‘Ali, be diligent about the salātul layl; be diligent about the salātul layl; be diligent about the salātul layl. Whoever considers salātul layl as worthless is not one of us.’

“Therefore, follow my advice, and advise my Shi‘as what I have advised you with. You should have forbearance and be patient; verily the Prophet said, ‘The best deed of my Ummah is waiting for the deliverance.’ Our Shi‘as will constantly be sad and anxious until my son [Imam al-Mahdi] makes his appearance, the one about whom the Prophet had given good tidings that he will fill the earth with justice and equality just as it would be filled with injustice and tyranny.

“So O my trustworthy Shaykh, Abul Hasan, be patient, and advise my Shi‘as to be patient because surely the earth belongs to Allāh and He will make his virtuous servants its masters—the final victory will be for the God-fearing people!

“May peace, mercy and blessings of Allāh be upon you and upon my Shi‘as. Indeed, Allāh is sufficient for us and He is the best of agents, the best Master and the best Helper.”

6. Words of Wisdom

Abu Hāshim al-Ja‘fari narrates that once a person asked Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (a.s.) the following question:

“Why does a woman get half of the share of a man in inheritance?” The question is about a son and a daughter inheriting from their father or mother: the son gets twice the share of the daughter.

The Imam: “Because jihād and maintenance of the family is not among the responsibilities of a woman. Even payment of the monetary compensation in case of an accidental homicide is upon the male members of the murderer, not the female members.”

When he heard this answer, Abu H^ḡshim said to himself: ‘I have heard that Ibn Abil ‘Awj^ḡ’ asked the same question from Imam Ja‘far as-S^ḡdiq and he received the same answer.’

Imam Hasan al-‘Askari looked at Abu H^ḡshim and said, “Yes! The question of Ibn Abil ‘Awj^ḡ’ was the same; and when the question is same, our answer is also the same...The first and the last of us [i.e., Imams of Ahlul Bayt] are equal in knowledge and position; of course, the Messenger of God and ‘Ali, the Leader of the Faithfuls, have their own privileged status.”

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“I advise you to be moderate and refrain from extravagance.”

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“To be humble means to greet whoever you pass by, and to sit wherever you find room [without waiting for the seat of your ‘status’].” He also said, “Humility is a blessing of which no one will be envious.”

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“One who admonishes his brother in private has decorated him; and one who admonishes him in public has disgraced him.”

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“The best self-discipline is to refrain [from doing to others] what you would dislike from others.”

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“Beauty of the face is an apparent beauty, and beauty of intelligence is a hidden beauty.”

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“All evil has been placed in a house whose key is lying.”

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“Generosity has a limit; when one exceeds it, it becomes extravagance.”

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This lesson has been written and compiled by Sayyid M. Rizvi by using the following source: *Pishway-e Yazdahum: Hazrat Imam Hasan ‘Askari (a.s.)* by Dar Rah-e Haq, Qum.

The main source has been extensively edited in order to fit the requirements of our course. Also, for the sake of brevity, we have not included the references quoted by our sources. Those who are interested to

know the sources may refer to the source mentioned above.

Question Paper on Lesson 48

Question 1: [20 points]

True or False:

- (a) Imam Hasan al-‘Askari was born in Baghdad.
- (b) “Al-‘Askari” is the Imam’s title because he was born in Samarra.
- (c) Mu‘tazz, Muhtadi and Mu‘tamid were caliphs during the imamate of the eleventh Imam.
- (d) Mu‘tazz forbade the presence of female singers in the court as a pretence of being pious.
- (e) Mu‘tamid’s reign was full of civil strife and tyranny.
- (f) ‘Ali bin Husayn bin Bābawayh was the father of Shaykh al-Mufīd.
- (g) In inheriting from the parent, the daughter gets half of the share of a son.
- (h) Mu‘tamid asked Imam al-‘Askari for help in disclosing the monk’s deceit.
- (i) Al-Kindi was writing a book to challenge the Nahju ‘l-Balāgha.
- (j) Ibn Abil ‘Awjā’ was a companion of Imam al-‘Askari.

Question 2: [15 points]

Describe and comment on the method used by Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (a.s.) to prevent Ishāq al-Kindi from writing the response to the Qur’ān.

Question 3: [15 points]

Describe the Imam’s miracle of rain in your own words.

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