

(Birth Anniversary of Imam Hasan Askari (PBUH

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He was born in Medina, the abode of divine revelation, the station of guiding angels and the school of the Prophet's Ahl ol-Bayt or the Blessed Household. The year of his birth was 232 AH corresponding to 846 of the Christian calendar. He was named Hasan and acquired the epithet of al-Askari because of living in the al-Askar or military quarter of the Iraqi city of Samarra, to which he and his father, Imam Ali al-Hadi (AS) were forced to take up residence by the Cruel Abbasid Caliph, Mutawakkil.

His period of imamate or divinely designated leadership was six years, yet during this short period, he left no stone unturned to teach to the Ummah the genuine principles of Islam as taught by his illustrious ancestor, Prophet Muhammad (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny).

The fact that today, after the passage of more than millennium, we continue to celebrate his birthday, is proof of his divine mission and gifted personality in helping the Ummah to prepare for the long centuries of Ghayba or occultation that would befall his son, the 12th Imam, who will reappear as the Mahdi to fill Planet Earth with the global government of peace, justice and equity after ridding it from tyranny, exploitation and injustice. The knowledge and authority of the Prophet's infallible Ahl ol-Bayt is God-given. They were the paragons of virtue, and the precedent set by them, still continues to be the model of emulation for all mankind. A wonderful saying from Imam al-Askari (AS), reads:

"Some seek prosperity and salvation, and they hold fast to the truth. Some others do not seek the truth and they lead an aimless life like those drifting on sea waves. Still others are in the captivity of the Satan and deny the truth. So be careful not to follow such people." The 11th

Imam, despite those cruel days of the Abbasids, moulded his followers into a tightly knit unit. He had to be extra cautious since the agents of the Abbasids in Samarra kept a close watch on him and were eager to implicate him in the uprisings that used to occur with frequency against the tyrannical regime of the caliph from North Africa to Khorasan in the east. Nevertheless, he strove to enlighten the seekers of truth and knowledge, who although in such distant places as Medina, Qom, Ahwaz and other places, were in touch with him through letters. The Imam's excellent exegesis on the Holy Qur'an, which is actually the compilation of his lectures and explanations of God's revealed word to students who had come to him from distant Khorasan, is widely read to this day and translated in several languages.

Imam Askari (AS) was the fountainhead of wisdom. He was eager to solve the people's problems through his proverbial generosity. The poet Abu Yousef says: "My hard life, coupled with the birth of a son in this state of poverty, made me write a plea to the Abbasid government for financial help, but I was spurned. When I got disappointed I remembered the Prophet's descendant Imam Askari (AS). I went to him. I hesitated in informing him of my problem, for I feared that he might not help me because of my reputation as the court poet of the Abbasids. I wandered around the Imam's house for sometime, before knocking at his door. The door opened and to my surprise a companion of the Imam came out and put in my hand a purse, saying: "Take these 400 dirhams. My master says cover the expenses of your newborn child with this amount. May God bless you and the child." Abu Yousef said: "I was astounded. I had neither met him as yet nor disclosed the request I entertained at heart, and here I was given the money. I thanked God Almighty for blessing the earth with the presence of such great and generous person. The spiritual aura surrounding Imam Hasan Askari was such that even his opponents used to respect him. The account of the famous Turkish Chief Minister of the Abbasid Court, Khaqaan, is a manifest example in this regard. Imam Askari (AS) was so kind that during those periodic bouts of imprisonment that he was subjected to by the Abbasid caliphs, even the jail wardens were impressed by his dynamism. One prison official has left an interesting account. He says: "When the Imam looked at me, I was so fascinated by his spiritual aura that it seemed my own soul was no longer in my control and possession." Such was the charisma of the Imam's personality that many a hard-hearted jailor was reformed and turned into a repentant and pious person to the bewilderment of the authorities. The Abbasid Caliph, Mo'tamed had fixed certain days of the week for the Imam's forced presence at the court for fear that Imam Hasan Askari (AS) might leave Samarra and mobilize people against the oppressive government. Only on these days were the people allowed to meet the Imam and that too under the watchful eyes of the court officials. Despite the restrictions and suffocated atmosphere, people would gather in large numbers to catch only a glimpse of their beloved Imam. They used to wait eagerly because of the love and affection in their hearts for the Prophet's infallible Ahl ol-Bayt, who were the rightful leaders of Islam and Muslims. Imam Askari (AS) saved the famous Arab philosopher Ishaq al-Kindi from manifest error. It happened that Kindi began entertaining some doubts on the meaning of the certain passages of the Holy Qur'an and thought of writing a book on the topic. The Imam came to know about this and raised interesting points during a discussion where one of the students of the said philosopher was present. Imam Hasan Askari's excellent

explanation of the Word of God and the inability of the human mind to properly grasp eternal wisdom unless expounded by those, to whom God had entrusted knowledge, had an electric effect.

The student went to his master and bringing up the discussion, raised the same points with the philosopher. Kindi was astounded and since he knew the limited ability of his own student asked him who had enlightened his mind with such lofty and excellent ideas. He was told it was the Prophet's heir, Imam Hasan Askari (AS). Kindi at once gave up his erroneous idea and acknowledged that if not for guidance from the Prophet's household who were repository of divine knowledge he would have been perished in ignorance.

Kindi was not alone in benefiting from Imam Askari (AS). There were a host of others who later developed into leading scientists, jurists, exegetes, theologians, and masters of different fields when they came into contact with Imam Askari (AS). Before ending our special feature,

please listen to maxims of the 11th Imam, who says:

"Refrain from wrongdoing and disobedience of God, for they cause poverty and chaos in the community." "One who possessed two faces and two tongues is a bad person. He is the one who praises his brother-in-faith in his presence and slanders him in his absence. If his brother attains a status, he envies him, and if he is involved in some difficulty, he leaves him alone and ".does not help him