

# EDUCATION - THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF IMAM SAADIQ (A.S)'S ERA

## **Lecture delivered by Brother Bashier Rahim during the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Jaa'far Saadiq (a.s) on 8 July 2018 (25th night of Shawaal) at Ahlul Bait (a.s) Mosque, Ottery, Cape Town**

If I were to say to you that the earth is flat, then you would probably look at me thinking that I am some uneducated ignorant person who knows nothing and should not be given much attention. But there was a time in history when this was the most commonly held belief and this included Muslim society of the earlier centuries who believed like this.

This may be a simple example of an issue that was already resolved by Pythagoras centuries ago who believed in a round earth, however there are other very philosophical issues that were boggling the mind of the masses for which there was

simply no cogent answer like the following:

- Does evil come from Allah?
- Since Shaytaan is created from fire (as he is a jinn), and jahannam is also fire, are we saying that shaytaan will not be affected by jahannam as it is the same material being fire?
- Is it possible to see everything that exists, if not in this world then definitely in the next world purely because it exists? In other words God exists but cannot be seen in this world, but can be seen in the next world because everything that exists can be seen?

These are among a plethora of philosophical questions that were bugging the mind of Muslims in the early part of the second century of Islam for which the well known scholars were providing simplistic and even illogical answers.

And it actually took someone by the name of Bahlul to sometimes resolve, who was assumed to be a mad man but was actually acting like that on purpose so that he could get a strong message across without being detained by the state or suffering any harm.

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So one day Bahlul did something strange to the famous scholar that had these views. He picked up a lump of earth and hit this famous scholar on his head with it and said he had now refuted all three of these beliefs of his.

The scholar was upset and complained to the Khalif about Bahlul and then the Khalif called him and questioned Bahlul by asking him "why did you throw the lump of earth and hit the scholar with it".

He answered, "I did not throw it". But the scholar who was sitting there protested, "you did throw it".

But Bahlul replied, "you yourself have maintained that evil is from God as men have no choice, so why do you blame me? And you have also said that the same material will not injure itself. The devil is from fire and thus the fire of hell would not hurt him. Accordingly you are from dust of the earth, tell me how it could injure you? You have also claimed that you can see God as a proof of his existence. Show me the pain you are complaining about that exists in your head?"

Of course the scholar could not reply to this.

Bahlul was a well known and learned companion of Imam Jaafar Saadiq (a.s), the 6th Imam of the Ahlul Bait (a.s) whose martyrdom we commemorate tonight.

## FINDING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE IN YOUR ERA

During the upcoming weekend from 13 to 15 July 2018, our madressa is having its annual youth camp for learners from level 4 to 12. We have put much effort into planning it which will include hosting an international speaker from Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania who will also be addressing our community on Thursday night after Dua Kumayl on the crucial topic of mental health. So after much thought and analyzing our needs, we have come up with the theme for this years camp to be "FINDING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE".

What do we mean by this?

We always speak about the three fundamental questions that every human being asks himself:

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- where do I come from
- where am I going
- why am I here

And we know the answers:

- I come from Allah
- I am going to the Hereafter
- I am here to worship Allah

And that's where it often ends.

But in the life of the 12 Imams, even though they all worshiped Allah, we see that this purpose of worship took a slightly different focus during different times.

During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (sawa), Imam Ali (a.s) participated in virtually every battle. During the period of the first 3 khalifs he DID NOT participate in the battles. And during his own khalifate he once again participated and led the battles. During each of these eras his purpose was expressed slightly differently and was done so in terms of the need of the time.

After the demise of Prophet Muhammad (sawa), for the first 6 months Imam Ali (a.s) was engrossed in the job of saving the Quran in written form. And during this time he even reduced his nawafil salaah to focus on this job.

During the era of house arrest of Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s), and the period of imprisonment of Imam Kathim (a.s), we see them performing 1000 rakaats of nawafil salaah each day. That was their purpose under those conditions.

After Karbala when the moral decay of the society was as low as the days of Jahiliyah, Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s) spent those years teaching humanity to become human again through his spiritually rich Duas.

And so in the time of Imam Husayn (a.s), we see him rising against the despotic ruler Yazid, as

governance required a major shake up.

### PURPOSE LINKED TO MULTIPLIER EFFECT

One important point that must be realized from these few examples that I quoted is that in identifying their individual purpose, the activity that received their focus ended up being one which yielded results for centuries to come. In other words their activities had a multiplier effect.

And this is something that is a hallmark of all great leaders. While all human beings have the same 24 hours in each day at their disposal, great leaders use that same 24 hours in a manner that produces an exponentially greater effect than others who use the very same 24 hours.

So after centuries of establishment of spiritual orders, for example, who has at their disposal a path of communicating with and reaching Allah through the treasure of Dua like that left by the Ahlul Bait (a.s)?

And after hundreds of battles that were fought over centuries, which battle continues to reverberate in the hearts of human beings more than Karbala? Mowlana Tariq Jameel from Deoband who visited South Africa last week and left a great positive mark on the majority of Muslims in South Africa, he made continuous reference in his speeches to Imam Husayn (a.s) and Karbala and its impact being felt 1400 years later. He says that's why until today people read nohas for Imam Husayn (a.s) and even continue to curse his killers.

And so we see wonderful examples in our very own time of our leaders and even regular people who found

***their***

purpose in life and left their footprint in history in a profound manner.

Ayatullah Khui was a giant in Fiq and focused on emphasizing academic excellence among his students. He is said to have produced 1000 mujtahids and what an amazing array of thinkers did he produce.

Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Sadr, besides shaking up and laying the foundation for the destruction of dictatorship in Iraq, and his great academic contribution in replying to the materialists of his time, he emphasized the Topical method of doing Tafsir of Quran and this has opened a whole new understanding of the Quran that scholars are literally disseminating on a day by day basis that we did not see before.

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Imam Khomeini focused on his purpose of establishing the Islamic Revolution in Iran which completely changed the map of the world and has a multiplier effect that is felt in every country.

When Allamah Tabatabai settled in Qum to teach he found that insufficient attention was given to studying Tafsir of Quran or emphasis to a Philosophical and Logical approach to Islamic sciences and he revolutionized exactly this. There is absolutely no doubt that Allamah was an outstanding mujtahid, but amazingly he chose NOT to be a marja or the leader of the Revolution but focused his life on writing his unique Tafsir al-Mizan. All of these examples is really something to ponder upon deeply.

Here at home our very own leader Mowlana Syed Aftab Haider has focused his life in recent years to establish this Mosque complex to ensure we have a solid infrastructure which then unlocks our ability to share our spiritual contribution to our society in an exponential way. This he did together with focused effort to establish the identity of Shia Islam in South Africa which we now see is already engraved in this country. And just yesterday we saw the effect of our established identity in

South Africa when President Cyril Ramaphosa visited the Imam Husayn (a.s) Mosque in Durban and spent almost 2 hours with the community.

**EFFECT OF NOT FINDING OUR PURPOSE** I am highlighting all of this as we see that many people, especially young people who initially have lots of positive energy failing to find ***their*** purpose in life other than in very broad terms and then getting involved in every possible course that pops up thinking that it is their purpose in life.

So if there's a whatsapp group debating with Sunnis then they think they belong there. And if there's a fight against crime then they think they belong there. And if there's a fight against gentrification and development in the CBD then they think they belong there. And if there's an uprising against poor service delivery then they think they belong there. And if there's a debate about who is more racist, then they think they belong there.

And so they go through life without having transformed their abilities and positive energy to first developing themselves into someone who is capable of making a difference and then getting involved in a purpose that has a positive multiplier effect into the future. And then years go by with nothing to show for your unfocused, purposeless driven effort. And this is so sad for us to witness.

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Tonight we commemorate the martyrdom of the 6th Imam Jaa'far ibn Muhammad al-Saadiq (a.s) and extend our condolences to our living Imam Mahdi (a.s) and to all the ulama internationally and all of you lovers of the Imam gathered here this evening. Imam Saadiq (a.s) lived for a number of years in the company of his grandfather Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s) who was the main survivor of Karbala and lived on to tell the story for another 34 years.

And his father Imam Baqir (a.s) was only 3 years old but also a witness of the tragedy of Karbala. And so the tragedy remained very fresh in his heart.

So many uprisings came about after Karbala including the uprising of his Uncle Zaid bin Ali who was the brother of Imam Baqir (a.s), but we see that Imam Saadiq (a.s) did not get directly involved as he could not see the positive multiplier effect that this movement would bring and even forecast it was going to fail, and that's what happened. Most of these movements were crushed.

But in the time of Imam Saadiq (a.s) and his father, when Ummayyad rule was ending and Abbasid rule was starting, we already see that one century of Islam had passed by and that so much had changed which caused so much disagreement in the ummah such that the only thing that Muslims unanimously agreed upon was the shahadatyn or the belief that there is no God except Allah and that Prophet Muhammad (sawa) is the Servant and Messenger of Allah. There was disagreement

about EVERYTHING else.

We also had other nations joining the house of Islam and Muslims being influenced by their philosophies.

We also see that for around 100 years already at the time of Imam Saadiq (a.s) that the Ahlul Bait (a.s) were sidelined in terms of being a source of knowledge. In other words, most of the Muslim world only had access to the teachings of an infallible person, being Prophet Muhammad (sawa) for 23 years. After that, knowledge was being transmitted and acquired by most from those who were not infallible. And this was the root of many challenges.

Prophet Muhammad (sawa) established and taught Islam over 23 years while for most of that time had very few followers until the last few years when there was mass conversation to Islam.

There was thus very little time to train ALL Muslims on the finer details of religion. Everyone was essentially trained on the basics. So the majority had a simplistic understanding of Islam.

Then with the passage of time as peoples minds started to develop and more philosophical type

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questions started being asked, there was a need to respond to these. But who could respond? There were few from among the sahabah who were highly trained by Prophet Muhammad (sawa) himself.

That is how the issue of a deeper understanding of Islam and its view of these philosophical issues became a necessity.

Even more so, on the very issue of Imamate itself which is the bedrock of Shia Islam, even there we see that confusion crept in even among Shia regarding who the appointed Imam was.

Thus people seemed to have thought that someone from among Ahlul Bait (a.s) who raised the sword and was willing to fight was the Imam worthy of being followed. That is how people followed Zaid bin Ali or another family member of Prophet (sawa) called Nafsin Zakiyyah or Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah and so on.

Due to the absence of reference to an infallible and the presence of thousands of unanswered questions, guess work became the norm and it was clothed under the term Qiyas or analogy, which is a method of argument that does not always produce the correct answer.

This famous scholar I referred to at the beginning of this lecture had a debate with Imam Saadiq (a.s) about his view on a variety of questions. Let me give you 2 examples out of many.

The Imam asks him, "Is adultery worse or the killing of a soul?" The scholar replied : "The killing of a soul." Imam Saadiq (a.s) said, "Allah commanded four witnesses in adultery and two witnesses in murder for proof of the allegation and this is contrary to the condition of qiyas or analogy."

Then he asked: "Is prayer more important or fasting?" He said prayer. The Imam said: "A woman is not obligated to fulfill the prayers not done during menstruation but still must complete the fasts not made and this cannot be rationalized with qiyas."

And there are many such examples where Imam Saadiq (a.s) showed the serious shortcoming in the use of analogy. Imam Husayn (a.s) fought to save Islam and sacrificed his life in the process. Imam Saadiq (a.s) especially, together with his father found their primary purpose to be one of education to save the Islamic knowledge on virtually every subject that was going lost. And he did this in such a profound manner with such a multiplier effect such that followers of 12ver Shia Islam became known as Jaafaris and identified themselves through the name of this Imam.

While the rest of the Muslim world had to try to decipher the answers to their questions from 23 years of information that they gathered from Prophet Muhammad (sawa) and in an environment where the recording of hadith was banned for many years, followers of the 12 Imams had access to the infallible personalities for a period of 342

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years which was up to the start of the major occupation of the 12th Imam.

How do you compare 342 years of teachings of the infallibles versus 23 years of teachings? This is one of the primary secrets of the rich, impactful heritage of the Ahlul Bait (a.s). And while we all love the Ahlul Bait (a.s), most don't follow them practically in their daily lives in the simplest things like how to perform wudu or salaah.

### **EDUCATION THAT IMAM SAADIQ (A.S) FOCUSED ON**

Ayatullah Shaheed Murtaza Mutahhari very aptly calls the era of Imam Saadiq (a.s) as an era where there was a "war of beliefs". There were heated arguments about:

- how to recite Quran
- how to interpret Quran
- authenticity of hadith

And more heated arguments about jurisprudence and Fiq.

And the most heated arguments on Theology about Almighty Allah, His Attributes, etc.

And then the most dangerous developments was the emergence of Atheism by a civilised class of society who were promoting this right inside Masjidul Haraam and Masjidun Nabawi.

And to round it off there were extremist Sufi ideas also being propagated.

If Imam Saadiq (a.s) did not focus on education during this era, what would have remained of the original Prophetic knowledge for us to benefit?

For each of these subjects and more, Imam Saadiq (a.s) established his view and left a mark for thousands of years to come.

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Both Sunni and Shia schools have Imam Saadiq (a.s) in common as he taught the great thinkers from both schools. Even many of the Sufi chains go through Imam Saadiq (a.s) through his student Bayazid Bastami of whom it is claimed that he inherited certain spiritual secrets from Imam Saadiq (a.s).

Imam Saadiq (a.s)'s approach to educating people on all of these hot topics was to emphasize the use of logic and to break free from parrot fashion narration devoid of understanding.

On the issue of Aqeedah and in particular Imamate, in the era when even among Shia there was confusion of who is the Imam, it was Imam Saadiq (a.s) who insisted on determining the criteria for Imamate from Quranic text itself and authentic ahadith emphasizing that one of the qualifying criteria of Imamate is the knowledge of the Imam. The Imam has inherent knowledge that is not acquired through the regular process of learning.

And Quran clearly makes reference to the existence of such a person of knowledge who is with Prophet Muhammad (sawa).

In the last verse of Surah Ra'd we read:

“And those who disbelieve say: ‘You are not a messenger’. Say: Allah is sufficient as a witness between me and you and he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.”

Prophet (sawa) proves His Prophethood through the existence of Allah and someone with him that has knowledge of the Book.... that Book being the one wherein everything is recorded. Sufficient to understand who this is will be to read Hadith Thaqalayn which declares that Prophet (sawa) leaves behind 2 weighty things, the Book of Allah and his Ahlul Bait (a.s). And these 2 never separate.

So if you want to know who is your Imam, he must be someone who has knowledge of everything or access to knowledge of everything.

That is how the issue of determining the Imam of your time was resolved after Imam Saadiq (a.s) when other sects appeared. People were encouraged to seek their Imam and clearly the line of Imam Kathim (a.s) triumphed.

## **APPROACH OF IMAM SAADIQ (A.S) TO EDUCATION**

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What was the approach of Imam Saadiq (a.s) to education, especially during that era? The Imam approached education in terms of the needs of the time together with the educational needs of the future. The Imam knew that the khalifs were not happy with their growing influence and were going to import Greek philosophy into the Muslim world and promote scientific development. So he approached education so answer these needs.

Firstly he stressed the value of Logic and the importance of using it. All the theological and philosophical uncertainties that existed and were still to come were resolved in this way.

Hadith and the existence of forged narrations which was a big problem at the time was resolved with a logical principle - measure the contents of the hadith against the Quran - if it agrees, accept it otherwise reject it. This solved all the bias one could have in determining authenticity by examining if a chain of narrators are reliable. Even if a supposed chain of narrators are reliable, if a hadith goes against the Quran then reject it.

The Imam looked at his students and encouraged them to pursue and excel in terms of their natural talent. Often in our time students pursue a career wherein they can make loads of money but which they don't have a natural flare for.

The Imam also made immense contribution to science and the pursuit of scientific knowledge and hundreds of works and theories are attributed to him which were only recently discovered.

Most importantly Imam Saadiq (a.s) had the approach to take knowledge from wherever it comes, even from a non believer as knowledge is the long lost property of a believer.

And so in our time, if you are looking for your purpose today, then as a community the acquisition of knowledge and the teaching thereof to others remains a top priority. We need to get involved in various aspects of education if we going to grow and flourish as a community.

Around the age of 65, after the Abbasids started consolidating power, their attention came back to curtail the movements of the Ahlul Bait (a.s). And so a golden period of learning and education was once again going to be placed on hold.

## **HIS MARTYRDOM**

While we speak highly of the academic achievements of Imam Saadiq (a.s), we should not for a

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moment think that he was not concerned with the corrupt Abasid government.

Imam Jaafar Saadiq (a.s) had a number of bold confrontations with the corrupt rulers of his day. The Imam stood up and spoke the words of truth without fear or hesitation. One day, the Abbasid ruler Mansur was in the presence of Imam Saadiq (a.s). Mansur had been shooting away a fly which kept bothering him. As the corrupt ruler became annoyed he asked the Imam, "...Why did God create the fly?" Imam Saadiq (a.s) replied, "To humiliate the arrogant ones."

Mansur remained silent because he knew that, had he spoken, Imam Saadiq (a.s) would have responded with an even more critical statement. But this same ruler chose to write to Imam Saadiq (a.s) one day asking, "Why don't you approach us as the people approach us?" The Holy Imam answered:

"There is nothing for which we fear you, nor do you have anything of the Hereafter that we would seek you for. Neither are you in a blessing such that we should congratulate you, nor do you see it as a burden such that we should send you our condolences. So what would we do at your place?"

Mansur wrote back, "You would accompany us to advise us." Imam Saadiq's response was decisive, "The one who wants this world would not advise you, and the one who wants the hereafter would not accompany you."

Mansur soon sought to relieve his worrisome thoughts about Imam Saadiq (a.s) once and for all. The tyrant had the immaculate Imam poisoned in Madinah. On his deathbed, Imam Saadiq

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(a.s) reminded his followers of an essential duty. The sixth Imam opened his eyes and looked into the faces of those around him saying,

“Indeed, our intercession does not extend to one who takes the prayers lightly.” With these words, Imam Saadiq (a.s) emphasized the significance of prayer and its relation to the intercession of Divine Mercy.

But our beloved Imam Jaa'far Saadiq (a.s) made his salaah in his life under more normal conditions. But look at the day of Ashura, on the plains of Karbala, the other day Mowlana Tariq Jameel, a great Sunni scholar says that salaah is so important that it must be made on time, anywhere, under any conditions and if there was any excuse for not making salaah it would be on Ashura. But we see Imam Husayn at the exact time of Thur salaah stands for salaah with his companions standing guard in front of him do that he can communicate with his Lord. And the price of this salaah is that the companions take arrow after arrow. And when the salaah was complete they were also finished and fell but asked "was I loyal to you oh Husayn"? They were meaning was I loyal to ensure that salaah was upheld?