

**3rd PRIZE WINNER**  
**Ahlul-Bayt Essay Contest**  
**\$600 Scholarship**  
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In a famous narration known as Hadith Thaqalayn (the Hadith of the Two Precious Things) Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that he is leaving two important things among the people before he departs to the next world, the Holy Quran and his family, the honorable Ahlul Bayt. He goes on further to explain that these two will never separate from each other until they meet with the Prophet at the Pool of Kowsar on the Day of Judgment. Such a heavy emphasis by the Holy Prophet himself on the importance of these two shows their significance and the great value to which we must hold them. Yet, some people, while acknowledging that these two are of great value, may question their practicality after more than a thousand years have gone by since the Prophet passed away. However it is vital for us to take realize that the Quran is the word of Allah, who is eternal, and consequently will never become obsolete. Similarly, the Ahlul Bayt, who will not separate from the Quran until the Day of Judgment, will never become outdated. Rather, it is only by implementing the lessons that we learn from the Quran and Ahlul Bayt that the problems of modern times can be solved.

Although all of the Ahlul Bayt are equal, each of them lived in a different situation, and was faced with different kinds of problems. I believe, when considering the issues most important to the world today, the life and characteristics of Imam Sajjad (AS) are of the greatest value to us.

One of the greatest problems facing Islam today, a problem coming not from the outside but rather internally, is the degree of corruption and ignorance within the Muslims themselves. This is not to say that all are like this, but there is enough to make this issue a major crisis. Many Muslims understand and practice only the literal meaning of Islam, but have not grasped its deeper values. They may do their daily prayers and fast during Ramadan, but have not adopted

the true culture of Islam. This problem prevents Islam from expanding or making major progress in the world. As long as the foundations of a building are weak, it cannot grow and is fragile. Only once the foundations have been fixed the building can become stronger, and similarly, only once the ignorance and corruption within the Islamic World has been eliminated can Islam make progress.

During the time of Imam Sajjad (AS), most of the Islamic World was also facing huge corruption and ignorance. The people who had martyred the grandson of Rasolollah were not Christians, Jews, or Polytheists, but considered themselves to be Muslim. They prayed and fasted, yet at the same time, were willing to commit such a horrifying crime. Despite the great valor and sacrifice of Imam Hussain (AS) and his followers in Karbala, their struggle would be in vain unless Imam Sajjad was able to spread their message among the people. Yet before he could do that it was necessary for him to cure the people from filth of their own ignorance and prevent Bani Ummaya from distorting the message of Islam any further. At the same time, the Imam was under grave danger from the government and needed to spread his message without seeming to be opposing it.

Despite this seemingly hopeless situation, the Imam acted brilliantly. It appeared to the rulers that he had retired to his home where he was in a state of constant praying and dua. The government could not find an excuse to harm him, as praying is not a crime, and while keeping a close watch on him, decided he was harmless. However, while the Imam certainly was in a constant state of prayer, and did not openly try to topple the government, he was actively engaged in trying to improve the wretched state of the Islamic World. Through his duas, now compiled in a book known as *Saheefe-ye-Sajjadia*, he was battling the ignorance that prevailed at his time. These duas, in addition to teaching the people how to pray, also taught them about the essence of Islam. Some topics covered included how a believer should address Allah, the virtues of the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt, the proper behavior of a Muslim, and the kind of life a Muslim should lead. Some of these ideas were of a nature that would have gotten the Imam arrested if he directly preached them to the people, but by being put in the form of dua, both reached the ears of the people and prevented the Imam from being arrested. In fact the value of *Saheefe-ye-Sajjadia* is to an extent that it is considered one of the most valuable texts in Islam after the Holy Quran and the *Nahj-ul-Balaaghe*. Imam Sajjad later also wrote *Risalat al-Huquq*, a text clearly defining certain human rights, whether it be to one's mother, teacher, or neighbor.

Through these texts, the knowledge of the people began to steadily improve and they were able to rise out of their earlier wretched state. What the government did not realize that through his duas, the Imam was repairing the weakened foundations of Islam and ensuring (with Allah's grace and permission) the preservation of Islam until the Day of Judgment. He was able to nurture the seed of Islamic Revival that Imam Hussain had planted on Ashura, which blossomed into the Islamic Seminaries of Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq, and will ultimately give fruit to the revolution of Imam Mahdi.

Today, as in the time of Imam Sajjad, Islam is being restricted by the chains of ignorance and corruption. Just as dictators like Yazid and Marwan Ibn Hakam claimed to be the leaders of Islam and dared to give themselves the title of *Amir al Moemeneen*, fraudulent men seeking only the pleasures of this life pretend to represent Islam today. They, while twisting the teachings of Islam and misguiding the naïve, have shattered the true face of Islam to the rest of the world. And even where such corrupt men do not rule, we still see Islam being restrained by the ignorance of the people. It does not matter if a group of students have the greatest teacher in the world, if they are not willing to study, they will not learn anything. In the same way that many of the people who killed Imam Hussain believed they were doing so for the sake of Allah, ignorant people in our era have demolished the holy shrines in Baqi and destroyed the Mosque of Imam Askari, and think they are acting in the name of Islam. With such ignorance so widespread among Muslims, nothing can be accomplished by Islam and the condition of the world will become more and more miserable. Before any other solution is offered, the ignorance must be eradicated. The culture of Islam must be spread among Muslims; they must understand the essence of Islam, not just its superficial surface. The only way to do this is through scholarly work from the *Ulama*, in order to teach the ignorant. The people must be given a firm foundation, starting from the most basic things up. In addition to that, the greatest effort must be invested in the Muslim children and youth. They are the ones who will ultimately have the power to change the fate of Islam. If they are given a strong foundation of knowledge, they can be successful where their parents had failed, and be able to strengthen Islam and spread its message of peace and justice in every corner of the world. It is every Muslim's responsibility to learn more about their religion everyday, and then teach what they have learned to their brothers and sisters in faith. Today, many naïve Muslims view the mosque as only a place of mourning, and the Quran as a mere book, like any other, only to be read in sad occasions such as funerals. This

negative culture must be changed and can only be done so with knowledge. People must learn to look up to the mosque not just in times of sadness, but also in situations of happiness and celebration. We must view the Quran as a living miracle and implement it on a daily basis into our lives.

Another lesson that can be learned from Imam Sajjad, and used to improve today's world, is that the Imam's actions spoke louder than his words. Although in a few limited occasions, like in the palace of Yazid, the Imam was given the opportunity to speak, he was mostly limited by the government. He could not openly denounce the government, so he used another, more effective method. First, as indicated earlier, he brought up the general knowledge of the people with his duas and prayers. Then, through his piety and actions, he allowed the person to judge themselves who was true representative of the Prophet. By bringing up their understanding, he, more effectively than any speech, made the people understand the true nature of the Ummaya government. When the people saw his great humility before Allah, they were drawn to his divine character and moved away from the ignorance and corruption spread by the rulers of their time. For example, whenever he the Imam would do his *wudu*, his face would become pale and his whole body would shake. When the people asked him why he was in such a condition, he replied "Do you not know before whom I am preparing to stand?" He would remain in this state until the end of his prayers, when he would cry so much that his beard would be wet from tears. During the night, the Imam would cover his face, and then visit the needy and serve them food. Most of the people served never knew that it was the Imam helping them until after his martyrdom.

Today, many Muslims, especially those living in the West in non-Islamic countries, are often encountered with negative stereotypes of Islam. The most effective way to battle these false perceptions is through action. It is not necessary to preach to them and have to point out every false detail in the stereotypes, if Muslims act as instructed to them in Islam, non-Muslims should be able to judge themselves. One person can change hundreds of people's false opinions, just through acting as he or she is supposed to. What may take us months to convince people through debate and argument can more effectively be taught to them with just one kind action. We do not need to lecture misguided people for hours about how we are not terrorists; by acting to them in a friendly manner, we show them how ridiculous such a claim is. This will not only convince them about the falsity of that specific stereotype, but also cause them to dismiss any other falsities they later hear about Islam. On the other hand, if we do not act according to the

guidelines given to us in Islam, outside people will see the fault not in us, but in Islam itself. No matter how much evidence they are given from the Quran and other sources that such stereotypes are false, they will not be convinced. It is our responsibility, to improve ourselves as much as possible, and try to follow in the footsteps of the Ahlul Bayt to prove through our actions what the true Islam is. While we certainly cannot reach the piety of the Imams, we should not underestimate ourselves and what we can do. Every opportunity must be used by us, so that through our actions, we can prove the true essence of Islam.

An additional trait of Imam Sajjad that we must learn from is the value that he placed upon the mourning for the tragedy of his father Imam Hussain. There was never a day that passed without the Imam mourning for the martyrs of Karbala. He started the tradition of mourning for Imam Hussain when he first entered Medina after returning from Damascus. By doing so, he ensured that Imam Hussain, his struggle, and message of saying no to oppression were kept alive in the heart of all Muslims forever. Through mourning, the public learned why Imam Hussain was killed and what his struggle represented. As a result of Imam Hussain, and Imam Sajjad spreading his message, many freedom fighters, Muslim and non Muslim alike, have learned never to bow down to oppression and made great changes to the world. Today also, we must continue the tradition of Imam Sajjad, and keep the struggle of Imam Hussain alive. We should not limit ourselves to physical aspects of mourning, such as crying and beating our chests (although these too are important), but ponder about the great action Imam Hussain did and learn from it. Muslims today should learn never to bow down to oppression and tyranny and do what they think is right no matter what is done to them.

As Muslims, we consider Islam to be the ultimate solution to all of the world's problems. Whatever good we are blessed with is because of Islam and whatever problems we suffer from are because of our own lacking. The greatest issue faced by the world today is a lack of understanding about Islam, both from non Muslims, and many Muslims themselves. Before we attempt to solve the issue of non Muslims, however, we must improve ourselves. To do this, we must follow the footsteps of the Ahlul Bayt. The problems we face today are very similar to those faced by Imam Sajjad (AS), and therefore he is the best role model for us to improve ourselves. Just as his father had helped revive Islam through the jihad of the sword, Imam Sajjad

revived Islam through the jihad of knowledge. Just like he battled the ignorance of his people, today we must improve Islam by battling the ignorance of our time. We must spread the true culture of Islam among Muslims and teach them the true essence of Islam. By investing in the youth, we can guarantee a better future and the spread of Islam. Once we have healed the foundations of Islamic society, the true nature of Islam will blossom and many of the problems faced by Islamic societies will be fixed. Once we have improved ourselves, it will be easy to show the rest of the world what Islam is. Through our actions, we can demolish the false stereotypes about Islam, and spread its message of peace among all people of the world. Finally by following Imam Sajjad's tradition of mourning for Imam Hussain, we can forever leave the message of fighting tyranny fresh in our hearts. By implementing the two great gifts left to us from the Prophet, the Holy Quran and the Ahlul Bayt, into are lives, from every aspect, whether it be personal, family, social, national, or internationally, we can greatly improve the world, and make it ready for the rise of the Promised Mahdi, the one who will, by the will of Allah, solve all of humanities difficulties and make a perfect world.

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## **Ahlul Bayt Essay Contest:**

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