

Chapter 1: The Birth of Sayyidah Fatimah az-Zahra

Fatimah az-Zahra was born in Makkah on the twentieth day of the month of Jumadi ath-Thani in the fifth year of 'The Declaration of Prophethood' (Bi'that), when Prophet Muhammad was 45 years old, as narrated by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq and Imam Muhammad al-Baqir; Sayyidah Khadijah b. Khuwaylid was her mother.

During one of his ascensions (Me'raj) to the heavens, Prophet Muhammad consumed various fruits, fresh dates and apples of Paradise. Allah transformed this food into water in the loins of the Prophet and when he returned to Earth, he spent the night with Sayyidah Khadijah, and subsequently, the light of Fatimah entered her womb. Thus Fatimah is referred to as the 'human hourie' in the sense that she lived on Earth like a human, however was from among the houries of Paradise.

From that point onward, whenever the Prophet desired to smell the sweet fragrance of Paradise, he would go to Fatimah and smell her, as she emitted the fragrance of Paradise and of the tree of Tuba. ¹ The Prophet would also frequently kiss his daughter although this was disliked by some of his wives due to their ignorance of the esteemed position of Sayyidah Zahra.

It is possible that a question may arise regarding the veracity of the above report since the ascension of the Prophet occurred six months before the Hijrah (migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah), while according to other reports, it occurred in the second year of the 'Declaration of Prophethood', while Sayyidah Zahra was born in the fifth year of the 'Declaration of Prophethood' – thus, how can the above report be accurate?

It should be noted that the ascension of the Prophet was not limited to a one-time event, such that this incident may be doubtful. Rather, it has been related from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq that the ascension of the Prophet of Allah took place one hundred and twenty times, and each time Allah advised the Prophet regarding the 'Wilayah' (mastership) and 'imamah' (leadership) of 'Ali and the Imams after him – more than all other religious precepts and obligations.

‘Allamah al-Majlisi states in his work, Bihar al-Anwar, that one day the Prophet was seated at a place named al-Abtah (between Makkah and Mina). He was accompanied by Imam ‘Ali, ‘Abbas b. ‘Abdul Muttalib, Hamzah b. ‘Abdul Muttalib, ‘Ammar b. Yasir, Mandhar b. ahdhah, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. Suddenly, Jibra’il appeared in his own enormous form, and his wings spanned from the east to the west and he said, “O Muhammad! Allah the Almighty sends you greetings and commands you to distant yourself from Khadijah for forty days.” This order was very difficult upon the Prophet for Khadijah was very dear to him and he was attached to her. However (because Allah’s order was dearer to him than anything else) the Prophet remained away from her for forty days and spent his days fasting and nights in worship until the last days arrived.

He sent ‘Ammar b. Yasir to Sayyidah Khadijah with the message that, “O Khadijah! Do not presume that I have distanced myself from you due to lack of love or heedlessness. Rather, (be informed that) my Lord has commanded me to do this so that He may execute His Decree. Do not imagine anything else except fairness and felicity. Allah the Exalted praises you abundantly on a daily basis in the presence of His Esteemed angels. When it becomes dark, close your door and rest on the bed, and behold that I have taken abode in the house of Fatimah b. Asad.”

Sayyidah Khadijah was deeply grieved due to the separation of the Prophet during the forty days period.

Upon its completion, Jibra’il descended upon the Prophet and said, “Allah sends greetings to you and says that you must prepare yourself for the recompense and gift.” The Prophet asked, “What is the gift from Allah?” Jibra’il displayed ignorance, when suddenly Mika’il descended with a tray covered with a cloth of fine silk or woven with heavenly gold brocade and placed it in front of the Prophet. Jibra’il proceeded further and said, “Allah commands you to break your fast tonight with this meal.”

Imam ‘Ali relates that, “The Prophet had taken abode at our house. At the time of breaking his fast, he would command me to open the doors so that anyone could come in and partake of the food with him. But that night, the Prophet commanded me to stand at the door of the house and said, ‘O son of Abu Talib! Consuming this meal is forbidden upon anyone except for me.’ I sat at the door and the Prophet entered therein alone and when he uncovered the tray, he saw one bunch of dates and one of grapes. He ate until he was satiated and also drank the water (which was there). Thereafter, he extended his sacred hands to wash them. Jibra’il poured the water, Mika’il washed them and Israfil wiped his hands. Then they ascended to the heavens with the leftover food.

The Prophet stood up to perform the (recommended) prayers, when suddenly Jibra’il reappeared and said, “The prayers are forbidden upon you at this moment, you should go and meet Khadijah, for Allah has promised Himself that tonight He shall create a virtuous child from your loins.” Hearing this, the Prophet proceeded to the house of Khadijah after forty days of separation.

An Account from Sayyidah Khadijah

Sayyidah Khadijah relates that, “I was accustomed to living alone during this period, and when it would get dark, I would cover my head, draw the curtains and lock the doors. I would then offer my prayers, turn off the lights and retire for the night. During that night (after the Prophet’s forty day separation), I was half-awake when the Prophet arrived and softly knocked at the door. I asked, ‘Who knocks at the door, for knocking at this door is not lawful for anyone except Muhammad.’

The Prophet of Allah replied with a sweet and soft voice, ‘O Khadijah! Open the door, I am Muhammad.’ I was overjoyed and opened the door and the Prophet entered therein. It was the custom of the Prophet that whenever he entered the house, he would call for water, perform the ablution, offer two units of (recommended) prayers and then he would retire for the night. But that night, he neither asked for water, nor prayed’ but instead, he reclined on the bed (with me). He arose from the bed and by Allah, the Prophet had not yet left me when I felt the light of Fatimah in my womb and felt the heaviness of pregnancy within me.”

The author (of this book) says that the Prophet remained aloof from Sayyidah Khadijah for forty days so as to prepare for a gift from Allah which would manifest in the sacred form of Sayyidah Fatimah. Thus in the supplications addressed to Sayyidah Zahra we read the following:

“Salutations upon the chaste and virtuous ... Fatimah, the daughter of Your Messenger and part of his flesh; the core of his heart; a piece of his liver; the one whom You chose for him, and the gift specialized with revelation...”

Thus, the Prophet remained aloof from Sayyidah Khadijah for forty days to reveal the esteemed position of ‘The Mistress of all the Women’ – Sayyidah Zahra – and indeed, none has the ability to frame this event into words. Allah sent a tray full of dates and grapes from Paradise to the presence of the Prophet to signify that these two fruits are a source of prosperity and plentiful gains, since no other tree produces more abundance than the date and the grape trees. Apart from this, these two trees were created from the excess mud that was (left over from the creation of) Prophet Adam and it is not far to assume that it signifies the abundance of (her) ‘chaste, pure, and felicitous progeny’, as will be quoted later at its appropriate place.

In regards to Jibra’il’s statement to the Prophet that, “The prayers are forbidden upon you at this moment”, he meant the recommended (nawafil) prayers and not the obligatory ones, for the Prophet had already completed the obligatory prayers before breaking his fast, and Allah is the Best Knower.

Her Birth

Shaykh as-Saduq relates through his chain of transmitters from Mufadhhal b. ‘Umar that, “I asked Imam as-Sadiq regarding the birth of Sayyidah Fatimah and the Imam replied, ‘When Khadijah married

the Prophet of Allah, the women of Makkah (due to their hatred with the faith of Islam) distanced themselves from her. They would not visit her house, or greet her, nor would they permit any of the women to visit her. Due to this, Khadijah was frightful and extremely distressed, lest they also harm the Prophet. However when Khadijah became pregnant with Fatimah, she (Fatimah) would speak to her mother from the womb and console her – something which Khadijah concealed from the Prophet. One day the Prophet entered the house and heard Khadijah speaking with someone and asked, ‘Who are you speaking to?’ Khadijah replied, ‘The child in my womb speaks to me and is my companion.’ The Prophet continued, ‘Jibra’il informs me that this child is a daughter, a chaste and auspicious child, and very soon Allah will multiply my progeny through her and the Divinely appointed leaders (Imams) will emerge from her progeny and will be made the vicegerents and (my) heirs after the termination of revelation (i.e. after my death).”²

Sayyidah Khadijah spent the days of pregnancy in this similar manner until the time of the birth of Sayyidah Fatimah arrived. She sent a message to the women of Quraysh and the Bani Hashim to assist her in childbirth, as was the custom that other women would assist a pregnant woman during her delivery. However the women of Quraysh and Bani Hashim replied saying that because she had not paid heed to their words and had rejected them by marrying Muhammad, the orphan of Abu Talib (‘Abdullah) who was indigent, they would not come to help her, nor assist her in any manner. What an extreme moment it was during the initial days of his official proclamation! The Prophet had many enemies and Islam was isolated to such an extent that even at the time of childbirth, people distanced themselves from the wife of the Prophet and refused to assist her!

Khadijah became restless and dejected after hearing their reply, but her Lord did not forsake her. Suddenly she saw four women with a wheat-coloured complexion and tall stature, similar to the women of Bani Hashim, enter her room. Looking at them, Khadijah was confused. Suddenly one of them said, “O Khadijah, do not be grieved! We have come to your aid by the command of Allah. We are your sisters, I am Sarah (the wife of Prophet Ibrahim); this is Asiyah, the daughter of Mazahim (the believing wife of Pharaoh), who shall be your companion in Paradise; while this is Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imran; and the fourth one is Kulthum, the sister of Prophet Musa b. ‘Imran. Allah the Almighty has sent us to assist you at the time of childbirth.”

One of them sat at the right side of Khadijah, the second on her left, the third facing her and the fourth behind her head. At that moment Sayyidah Fatimah arrived in this world in a pure and virtuous state. As soon as she lay on the earth, a radiant light emerged from her that shone upon all the houses of Makkah, and there was nothing in the east or in the west, except that her glittering light gleamed upon everything.

Suddenly, ten houries of Paradise descended, carrying trays and pitchers filled with the water of the fountain of al-Kawthar. The woman standing in front of Khadijah lifted up Fatimah and washed her with the water (of al-Kawthar). Then two white pieces of cloth which were whiter than milk and emitted

fragrance better than musk and amber were brought and she was wrapped in one of them, while the second one was used as a veil and scarf. Thereafter they requested Fatimah to speak. She opened her mouth and bore witness to the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad in these words, “I bear witness that there is no other deity worthy of worship except Allah; and that my father is the Messenger of Allah, the chief of the Prophets, and that ‘Ali is the chief of the vicegerents, and my sons are the leaders of the tribes (Asbat).”³

Thereafter, she greeted the four women addressing them by their names and they in turn attended to her with content and smiling faces. The houries and the dwellers of Paradise greeted one another upon the birth of Fatimah, while a glorious light shone upon the heavens, the like which the angels had never seen before.

The women then turned towards Khadijah and said, “Take hold of your child, who is chaste, virtuous and filled with prosperity and auspiciousness, and a blessed progeny will emerge from her.”

Khadijah took her in her arms with delight and fed her. Fatimah’s age increased daily equalling to a month (of an ordinary child) and every month equalling one year compared to other children.

Her Names

Yunus b. abiyān relates that Imam Ja’far as-Sādiq said, “Fatimah possesses nine names in the presence of Allah: Fatimah, as-Siddiqah (the honest one), al-Mubarakah (the blessed one), at-Tahirah (the virtuous one), az-Zakiyyah (the chaste one), ar-Radhiyyah (one who is pleased with Allah), al-Mardhiyyah (one who will be satisfied by Allah), al-Muhaddatha (a person other than a prophet with whom the angels speak to), and al-Zahra (the splendid one).” He continued, “Do you know what Fatimah means?” I replied, “O my master, relate it to me”, and he replied, “The one separated from every type of filth.” He then continued, “If the Commander of the Faithful⁴ ‘Ali would not have been created, there would have been no match for Fatimah throughout this entire world, from the time of Adam until the end of the world.”⁵

It is also related in some traditions that she was named Fatimah because she and her adherents would be ‘separated’ from the fire of hell, and also because she was different from others due to her wisdom and excellence, and because she was immune from the menstrual blood. While it is beyond human imagination to recognize her excellence, Allah has kept her, her monotheist and believing progeny, and her friends away from the fire of hell.

It is also related that her name Fatimah originates from the name of Allah, ‘al-Fatir’ (which means The Originator).

She is named ‘at-Tahirah’ because she was purified from all filth and error and because she never witnessed the blood of menstruation or childbirth.

She was named 'al-Zahra' because the light of her beauty shone three times daily for the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali.

Abu Hashim Ja'fari relates, "I asked Imam Hasan al-'Askari as to why Sayyidah Fatimah was named 'al-Zahra' and the Imam replied, 'The illuminated countenance of Sayyidah Fatimah shone for Imam 'Ali in the beginning of the day, similar to the shining sun; and at the time of the early evening similar to a radiant moon; while at sunset it resembled the glowing stars.'"

Shaykh as-Saduq relates from Imam 'Ali al-Ridha that he said, "When the moon of the month of Ramadhan would shine in the sky, the light of Sayyidah Zahra would prevail upon the light of the moon and would conceal it. The moon would be visible only when Fatimah would not be present."

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq relates, "Fatimah is named al-Zahra because a dome of red rubies has been created by Allah for her in Paradise. The height of the dome measures a distance equalling one year (of travel) and is suspended in the air by the power of Allah, without being held by chains from the Heavens so as to take care of it, nor is it supported by pillars on the Earth so as to be attached to it (it is suspended in between the Heavens and the Earth). The dome contains ten thousand doors and on each door, one thousand angels stand on guard. The dwellers of Paradise will behold the dome just as you see the shining stars on the skies, and it will be said to them: 'This glowing (castle) belongs to Fatimah.'"

It is related in another tradition that once, Allah wished to test His angels. He sent a black cloud towards them that turned the atmosphere dark such that they could not even see one another. They requested Allah to remove it and Allah accepted their plea and created the light of Fatimah which was similar to a lamp. Allah suspended it (the lamp) all throughout the Heavens such that the seven Heavens and the seven Earths all glittered by the glow of her light. The angels praised and glorified Allah and He said, "I swear by My Honour and My Glory! Certainly I shall gift the recompense of your praise and glorification (of Myself) until the Day of Resurrection to the friends of Zahra and the friends of her father, her husband and her sons."

Among the other names of Sayyidah Zahra are: al-Hisan, al-Hurrah, as-Sayyidah (the mistress), al-Azra' (the virgin), al-Hawra' (a hourie), Maryam al-Kubra (the elder Maryam) and al-Batul (one who never experienced the blood of menstruation). It is related that she is named 'al-Batul' because she never witnessed the blood of menstruation; and similarly Maryam, the mother of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was also named 'al-Batul.⁶ Some scholars relate that her name 'al-Batul' is derived from 'Batal' (to remain detached), and it means that she remained aloof from the (pleasures of the) world and sought closeness to Allah; while others say that she was named so because she was unparalleled and unique.

Ibn Shahr Ashub states in his book al-Manaqib that, "It is related through trustworthy authorities that Sayyidah Fatimah had twenty names, and each of her names conveyed one of her excellences", and these names have been quoted by Ibn Babawayh in his book, Mawlid Fatimah.

Her kunyah (titles) have been stated as: Ummul Hasan, Ummul Husayn, Ummul Muhsin, Ummul

Imams, Umme Abiha and Ummul Mu'minin and these titles have been quoted in the salutations addressed to her.

It is also quoted in al-Manaqib that in the Heavens she is known by the name of al-Nuriyyah (the glowing one), al-Samawiyyah (the heavenly one) and al-Haniyah (the compassionate). She is named al-Haniyah because she was kind and affectionate towards her husband and sons.

An Example of Her Kindness Towards her Husband

It is sufficient to mention that she bore patiently the physical strikes, insults, breaking of her bones, the wounds of the whip on her arms that had swelled, and all of this patience was due to her immense love towards her husband and in defence of his sanctity, until ultimately she was martyred due to these sufferings.

While on her deathbed she wept and Imam 'Ali asked her, "Why do you weep?" She answered, "I weep upon the sufferings that will befall you after my death." The Imam replied, "Do not weep. I swear by Allah that if these calamities befall me in the way of Allah, I consider them to be minute and naught."

Shaykh al-Mufid in his book Kitab al-Irshad relates that in the eighth year of the migration, the Prophet of Allah commanded Amirul Mo'minin 'Ali to proceed on an expedition of Dhat al-Salasil⁷ to the sandy region of Yabis to crush the rebellion of the enemies. Imam 'Ali possessed a headband that he would tie whenever he would have to go to a fierce battle and when he resolved to go for this expedition, he came to Sayyidah Fatimah and ask her for it. She asked, "Where are you going and where does my father intend to send you?" The Imam replied, "I have been commanded to proceed on an expedition to the sandy region (of Yabis)." Hearing this, Sayyidah Zahra started weeping due to the danger of that battle and her love and concern for her husband. At that moment, Prophet Muhammad entered the house and told her, "Why do you weep? Do you fear that your husband will be killed? No, he will not be killed by Allah's will." Imam 'Ali said, "O Prophet of Allah! Do you not desire that I should be martyred and thus enter Paradise?"

Her Affection Towards her Sons

It is sufficient to quote what Shaykh as-Saduq has quoted from Hammad who relates from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq that he said, "It is not lawful for a man to marry two women (at the same time) from among the descendants of Sayyidah Fatimah, for when this news reaches her she is agrieved." Hammad asked, "Does this news reach her?" Imam replied, "Yes, by Allah!"

A Dream of Ibn 'Unayn – A Seventh Century Poet

An astonishing event has been quoted in the book Umdatul Talib regarding Bani Dawud b. Musa al-Hasani who is renowned amongst the genealogists and others, and it is transmitted through a reliable

chain of authorities and quoted in the 'Diwan' of Ibn 'Unayn.

The famous poet, Ibn 'Unayn, once proceeded towards Makkah with a large amount of wealth and merchandise. On the way, he encountered some of the sadat⁸ of Bani Dawud, who robbed him and destroyed all of his merchandise; they even took the clothes off of his body, injured him and left him alone in a wretched state.

Ibn 'Unayn wrote a letter to 'Aziz b. Ayyub, the King of Yemen, complaining to him (about what had happened to him) and requested his assistance. During that period, the king of Yemen had dispatched his brother, Malik Nasir to the bank of a river that he had freed from the hands of the Europeans and had conquered. Malik Nasir requested his brother (the king) to permit him to stay for a while at the banks of the river.

Ibn 'Unayn, in his letter that was comprised of a provocative couplet, incited the king of Yemen to seek revenge from the sadat who had plundered his belongings. The starting words of the couplet were as follows:

“Your virtuous qualities and munificence are beyond the capacity of eulogizing by the eloquent; you have reached such position with regards to your benevolence that has exceeded the frontiers of goodness; do not say that I have conquered the bank that was under the colonization of the Europeans, for the bank cannot be compared with the city of Aden, these both cannot be similar; then if you intend the 'holy war', unsheath your sword against the community that have destroyed the precepts and customs of Allah; then purify the 'House of Allah' (the Ka'bah) with your sword from the pollution and the degraded and ugly community (the Bani Dawud); do not say that they are among the progeny of Fatimah and that you would not fight them; for if these people would have gained access to the family of Harb (Abu Sufyan), they would have united to kill Imam Hasan.”

When Ibn 'Unayn compiled these verses and sent it to the king of Yemen, one day he dreamt that he was near the Ka'bah. Sayyidah Zahra was circumambulating the Ka'bah. He stepped forward and saluted her but she did not reply to him. He started weeping and humbly asked her what sin he had committed that stopped her from replying to his salutation. In reply to Ibn 'Unayn, Sayyidah Zahra recited the following verses:

“Never! The entire progeny of Fatimah be base and degraded, but time has oppressed us with deceit and deception; if one person from among my progeny dealt with you with evil, you should not have deliberately abused us all; then repent on your attitude, for if any one treats us badly and then repents (sincerely), Allah will forgive him; then hold them (the sadat) dear for the sake of their grandfather Mustafa and do not hurt any one from among his progeny nor insult them; then whatever (harm) reaches you from them, ask its recompense from us on the Day of Resurrection when you meet us.”

Ibn 'Unayn relates that, “I awoke from my sleep wailing and in fear. I saw that the wounds of my body had healed due to Sayyidah Zahra. I repented and regretted my words and then compiled these words

in repentance:

‘I repent in the presence of the daughter of the Messenger, the Guide against the crime and request her to forgive me; and accept repentance from the one who suffered due to his words; I swear by Allah that if anyone from among them (the sadat) were to tear me to pieces with their spears or swords, I shall not deem it to be evil, but shall look at it with goodness.’”

1. Ref. to the Qur’anic Verse: “(For) those who believe and do good, a great bliss (Tuba) shall be theirs and a beautiful place of return.” (Suratul Ra’d (13):29). Tha’labi in his Tafsir relates from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir that the Prophet was questioned regarding the above verse to which he replied, “Tuba is the name of a tree in Paradise whose roots shall be in my house and its branches will be in the houses of other believers.” The narrator asked, “O Prophet of Allah! We put forward the same question to you before and you replied that it is the name of a tree in Paradise whose roots shall be in the house of ‘Ali and its branches in the houses of other believers.” The Prophet replied, “Verily my house and that of ‘Ali shall be one and the same in Paradise.” (Sayyid Hashim al-Husaini al-Bahrani, “Ghayatul Maram”).

2. Ref. to the Qur’anic verse: “And We intended to bestow (Our) favour upon those who were considered weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs.” (Suratul Qasas (28):5).

Hafiz al-Haskani al-Hanafi says that Abu’l Hasan al-Farsi related to me through his chain of transmitters from Mufadhhal b. ‘Umar who says that he heard from Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq that the Noble Prophet looked at ‘Ali, Hasan and Husain and wept and then said, “You are the ones ‘considered weak’ after me.” Mufadhhal says that, ‘I asked the Imam as to what the Noble Prophet meant?’ Imam as-Sadiq replied, ‘The Prophet meant that you are the Imams after me’, then he recited the above verse and said, ‘Thus this verse refers to us until the Day of Resurrection.’

3. Refer to the Qur’anic verse

“And of Musa’s people is a party, who guide (people) with truth and thereby do justice. And We divided them into twelve tribes (or) nations” (Suratul A’raf (7): 159–160).

4. The Commander of the Faithful, a title specific only to Imam ‘Ali bestowed upon him by the Prophet of Allah.

5. Shaykh al-Kulayni, “Usul al-Kafi”, vol. 1, ch. 461

6. ‘Umar b. ‘Ali relates from Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib that he said one day the Prophet was asked, “What is the meaning of Batul, as we have heard you say Maryam al-Batul and Fatimah al-Batul?” He replied, “Batul is used to refer to a woman who never sees red (menstrual blood), meaning she never menstruates, because menstruation is resentful if it occurs in a Prophet’s daughter.” (Shaykh as-Saduq, “Ilal ash-Shara’iy”).

7. In the eighth year of the migration, twelve thousand polytheists of the Valley of Yabis gathered and pledged that they would kill both Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Ali. When the Noble Prophet was informed about this, he dispatched Abu Bakr with four thousand men against them with orders that first, he should invite them towards Islam and if they refuse then to fight them, however Abu Bakr returned back without accomplishing the task.

The Noble Prophet told him, “You disobeyed my orders and did not perform what I asked, by Allah, you are a disobedient one.” Then he sent ‘Umar b. al-Khattab with similar orders but he too returned back unsuccessful. Then the Noble Prophet sent Imam ‘Ali, who as usual, accomplished the task most obediently and put to sword the polytheists (in defence). The chapter of the Qur’an, al-Adiyat was revealed regarding this expedition and several other verses also came down in praise of Imam ‘Ali.

When Imam ‘Ali returned back victoriously, the Noble Prophet himself went forth to welcome him and said, “Ascend your mount, Allah and His Prophet are pleased with you.” He then continued, “O ‘Ali! If I had not feared that a group from among the nation would attribute such thing (divinity) to you as the Christians attribute to ‘Isa, I would have narrated several words in your praise. Today you shall not pass by a group of men, except that they will take the Earth from beneath your feet as blessings.”

8. Literally this word means masters. A word of respect referred to those from among the descendants of Prophet Muhammad through Sayyidah Zahra and Imam 'Ali.

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