

Interview with the Daughter of Allamah Tabataba'i

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Article

A conversation with Kh^{an}um Najma S^{ad}at Tab^{atab}'a (Daughter of 'All^{ama} Tab^{atab}'a)

Interview with the Daughter of Allamah Tab^{atab}'a, in Memory of the Celebrated Commentator of the Qur'an

The 24th of Shab^{an}, 1383 S [14th November, 2004] is the 23rd anniversary of the death of the great commentator of the Qur'an, 'All^{ama} Tab^{atab}'a. In commemoration of this occasion we went to visit his beloved daughter, her Excellency Kh^{an}um Najma S^{ad}at Tab^{atab}'a (the wife of Shah^{id} Ayatullah Qudd^{us} (qs)), so we could reap from the harvest of her knowledge and her presence and adorn the pages of our publication with the name of 'All^{ama} Tab^{atab}'a. That which follows is a selection of the information and beautiful recollections of her illustrious father she narrated for us:

'Allama's Spiritual and Academic Pursuits

Q) With greetings and gratitude for the time you have made for us. If you could please begin by telling us about 'All^{ama}'s spiritual and academic pursuits.

A) He ['All^{ama}] regarded academic work and in particular the commentary of the Qur'^{an} as worship (*'ib^{adat}*) and spent most of his time busy with this work. He never wasted even a single minute of his time. Whenever I remember him I see our father with a pad of paper or manuscript, his head consistently down in the state of studying or writing.

Other than praying on time – to which he gave great importance – and visiting the shrine of Hadhrat Ma's^{uma} (a) which he tried to do every day, most of his time was spent in these affairs, and never did we see him without anything to do. Sometimes I would say to myself, why is H^{aj} ^qgh¹ always busy with this same work?

'All^{ama} had allocated a certain time of his day during which he would recite the Qur'^{an}.

Occasionally it would occur to me that an individual who wants to spend the night in worship must only recite supplications (*du'^{as}*) until morning, but he would tell me “my daughter, whatever you do sincerely for God, it is worship” – although he of course never said that this work of mine is a form of worship.

With His Children

Q) What advice did he have for his children?

A) One of the phrases he would always use is: “Know God as being Ever–Present and Ever–Observant” (*Khod^{ay} r^o h^{azir} wa n^{azir} beb^{an}d*). He would repeat this line so often that when I was a child I used to think that H^{aj} ^qgh¹ didn't know anything else. Of course 'All^{ama} spoke very little but when he did speak his words were chosen precisely. He emphasized this matter so much that we used to think it was impossible that an act be carried out for other than God.

His words were full of meaning. For example, [he would talk to us] about the conduct of our great ones, and how young girls and boys should behave. With his daughters he was very intimate and friendly and with his sons he behaved seriously.

He [ʿAllāma] placed great importance on respecting one's elders. He even felt joking with them was not appropriate. In one of his words of advice to my son Shahīd Muhammad Hasan (ra) who one time joked with someone older than him, he said,

I was 7 or 8 years old when a painter was working in our home. When he climbed his animal I tickled his leg. My late father said to me, “My dear son, an individual doesn't play jokes on his elders.” From that moment I have always remembered his words and even now that I am an old man I am still reluctant to joke with those who are older than I. This respect must be maintained [for our elders].

With His Family

Q) During the time that ʿAllāma dedicated for his family, what did he spend most of time doing?

A) During the time which he had allocated for his family he spent much of his time with his daughters. From among his children his daughters were extra special to him. Those moments were so sweet for me that sometimes I tell my own children, if only I could re-live one minute of that time we used to spend with Hāj ʿaghā! Being with him was both educational and pleasurable. In the time we used to spend at night sitting together he would narrate stories of the Prophets and the fate of different nations to us.

With his children he was so playful that when we were children sometime we used to think that Hāj ʿaghā doesn't even know his alphabet.

My mother used to try to get him [ʿAllāma] to sit on a special mattress at the front of the room and to lean on a cushion, but he would never sit at the front of the room. We had special respect for him. We liked him so much that we did not want him to utter a single sigh. Whatever our mother told us we would immediately carry out lest Hāj ʿaghā become unhappy with us.

He [ʿAllāma] was ready to take on every difficulty himself so that his children would be at ease. He never used a mattress to sleep on, and even when eating he believed that first the children should eat and then he himself. Even though he spent 40 years living with my mother, they always used to try and compete in carrying out household chores before each other. As a result we learnt from their actions never to give the burden of our own responsibilities to others.

Internal household affairs and issues related to the children were mostly the responsibility of my mother – in particular, affairs related to us girls, – and Hāj Agha would have supervision.

My mother used to conduct herself in such a manner that it was never necessary for her to be reminded about anything. For example once she told us, “When a nāmāhram [someone of the opposite gender

with whom marriage is permissible] comes, your socks should not be thin.” And as a result of her conduct we also learnt how to behave appropriately. I remember one day we wanted to go out and my mother had worn two pairs of socks, one on top of the other. I said, “Mother dear, why have you worn two pairs [of socks]?”

She replied,

“You see my daughter, it's true my chador is long, but gradually [if one becomes lax in observing rules such as those of hijāb, then] it becomes normal for an individual to no longer give importance [to something such as covering one's feet].”

She [my mother] strongly believed that because we were the family of a religious scholar, and [religious families] maintain the honor of Islam and others are more likely to look up to them, we must all be extra careful in our behavior. My mother's conduct taught us many things.

When my father would inquire about how I was doing [after marriage] he would always first ask about ʿġh Quddʿs's mother. He would often advise me in respect to my mother-in-law and father-in-law, and would stress that I should behave in a way that would not upset them. He would tell me that you must take care of them. At the same time ʿġh Quddʿs's mother was very good woman, very religious and just, and would always defend me in front of others. Sometimes when her name comes up I say to my children that truly this great woman deserved a son like ʿġh Quddʿs.

Hāj ʿġh used to also advise me regularly in respect to ʿġh Quddʿs. ʿġh Quddʿs had a habit of lengthening his midday (*dhuhr*) prayers, for example placing a sun-dial [near his prayer mat] and praying according to special etiquette. As a result of his lengthy prayers the children's lunch would be delayed, and I used to say to myself, “O Allah, I don't want ʿġh Quddʿs to fall ill, but let something happen that he doesn't pray on time.” When 'Allāma understood [what I was thinking] – I remember we were in Mashhad for the summer – he called me aside and told me, “My daughter an individual must be the cause of others praying on time not the opposite”. I agreed, and from that time I no longer got upset when ʿġh Quddʿs lengthened his prayers.

With his Grandson

Q) Do you have any memories of the relationship between Shahʿd Muhammad Hasan (ra) ['Allāma's grandson, Khānum Najma's son] and 'Allāma (qs)?

A) Muhammad Hasan had a remarkable relationship with Hāj ʿġh. I don't know the reason behind this, for their relationship exceeded the regular friendship that exists between grandson and grandfather. In that last year when we were in Tehran, Muhammad Hasan was very active, regularly going here and there [participating in revolutionary activities] when the universities were shut down during the Cultural Revolution and getting very tired as a result.

Despite this, every night when he would return he would visit Hāj ʿĠgh. He used to say, “one hour in the presence of Hāj ʿĠgh is equal in value to my entire life.” He narrated from Hāj ʿĠgh that one should read Ziyārat ʿAlī-Yūsʿn every day, and if not then it must be read on Fridays under the open sky. One should also try and read the supplication that follows the Ziyārat, for it is the cause of growing closer to Imām Zamān (aj).

‘Allama’s Wife

Q) What was your mother’s role in terms of upbringing and what memories do you have of her?

A) During that time it wasn’t common for daughters from religious families to attend school. But Hāj ʿĠgh believed that if the upbringing in a family was appropriate and that the daughters and sons in that family were properly raised and grew up to be strong individuals then even an inappropriate environment would not be able to shake them. Despite the fact that daughters of religious scholars rarely attended school, we did go to school. Because of this very upbringing we never desired to be like the other girls at all, and thank God the environment had no effect on us.

Educational and academic affairs were taken care of by my mother, and my father also had a say. He would always ask us about what we did and what we learnt [in school].

My mother interacted with nāmahrams in such a manner that they never glanced at her, and as a result we were also trained to do the same and made a habit of behaving similarly. She used to recite the Qurʿān a great deal, and I had memorized some of the chapters of the Qurʿān by the time I was 8 or 9 years old because of her frequent recitation.

She [my mother] was amazing when it came to helping others. She would constantly address and resolve the problems of other student families. When she passed away her funeral was attended by a very large number of people.

My mother was an incredible woman. Not once did she abandon reading Ziyārat Ashʿr. She was such a believer in this that one day if she was not able to read the Ziyārat she would not go to bed until she had read it at night.

My father had a unique respect for my mother. Their life together was exceptionally sweet and enjoyable. Even though she faced many problems in her life, never did my mother complain.

Once my younger brother [Nūr ad-Dīn] fell ill and had a very high fever. My mother took him alone to the doctor’s office and even though the doctor said that because of a severe infection my brother would not live past that night, she did not give this news to my father, because she thought if she did then he would not be able to concentrate on his work. That night I don’t know what prayers my mother made, but [as a result of these prayers] my brother’s health improved.

At the end of the night Hāj ʿaghā asked,
“How is Nūr ad-Dīn's condition?”
My mother answered,
“He is better now.”

My mother strongly believed that the result of one's actions can be seen in this world. Even though our situation was much better when we were in Tabriz in terms of having a large home, a servant, a maid and a cook, yet when we were moved to Qum my mother used to say, “not for a minute would I exchange my current lifestyle for the lifestyle we used to have.”

And she used to say, “one minute that I spend reading the works of Hāj ʿaghā gives me such pleasure that I feel as if they have purchased heaven for me.” She loved Hāj ʿaghā her with soul and heart despite the difficulties life had placed in her path. There were winters when we didn't even have coal, but she never did she get upset.

Her patience and forbearance were just as amazing. Even when her daughters were leaving their home to go to their husband's home she never told Hāj ʿaghā about the things they required because she wanted his thoughts to be undisturbed.

One day because of the hard time we were facing as a result of renting a place I told my mother,
“Mother dear, you always pray so much that others are able to buy a house, why don't you make a vow (*nadhr*) that we can also own a house?”

She said,
“What ever is in our fortune is good for us.”

To the end of her life they always rented a place [and were never able to buy a house].

Even though our life in Tabriz was very comfortable, when we came to Qum for two years we rented one room for [the two of them and] four children, and sometimes Hāj ʿaghā would hold his classes in the same room. But at night when we gathered around one another, it was as if we had no care in all the world.

She used to always advise us not to complain to our husbands because she said men have their own problems and they cannot bear more than that or else they will become grieved, and if their problems became too heavy it is possible they might have heart-failure.

After my mother passed away my father used to say, “I cannot bear to look at her empty spot in the room,” and for two years every day without fail he would visit her grave in *Qabrestāne No*, and then visit the shrine of Hadhrat Ma'sūma (a).

Leading a God-conscious Life

Q) What advice do you have for young women?

A) I heard from [Hajj Mirza Asadullah Khan](#) Qudd^{sa} that we have a narration which says, if someone gets married for something other than the sake of God, he will not get that which was his intention [in getting married]. For example if the marriage is for money nothing will reach him of that money. If it is for beauty again it will not benefit him.

Our youth should not let the sustenance (*rizq*) and glitter (*barq*) of this world occupy them. Unfortunately in today's world when someone goes to ask for a woman's hand in marriage he does not ask about her religiosity, her origins or her family. He is not concerned with how much God is a part of her daily activities, or how well she knows God, but rather what is important to him is her occupation, her cell phone and her car...[etc] This is why today they get together and tomorrow they go off on their separate ways.

Our beloved youth must always ask for help only from God. I always advise my children that if you think of yourself as a blind person left to fend for himself in the streets not knowing what is going to happen to him, and ask only God for assistance that He help you reach your destination, then be sure that God will never leave you to fend for yourself. Hadhrat Imam Zam^{an} loves youth and God also loves His servant and will not leave him alone. Our activities must be for the sake of God, and in return God will surely favor us.

Q) What was Hadhrat 'All^{ma}'s (qs) view about *Maktabe Tawh^{id}*² and its founding? Did [Hajj Mirza Asadullah Khan](#) Qudd^{sa} consult him in this matter?

A) Hajj Mirza Asadullah Khan was very pleased with this act of [Hajj Mirza Asadullah Khan](#) Qudd^{sa} [that is, the founding of the Maktabe Tawh^{id}] and used to say that this is an innovative undertaking and God-willing it will be successful. He also said, “Girls must study and become familiar with religious teachings so that they themselves can comprehend Islamic rulings.”

Q) We thank you again for the time you made for us and we send our respects to the lofty souls of 'All^{ma} Tab^{ataba}'¹ (qs), his distinguished wife, the highly-stationed Shah^{id} Qudd^{sa}, and the dear Shah^{id} Muhammad Hasan Qudd^{sa}.

A) God-willing may you be successful. I hope that the esteemed women at Jamiat al-Zahra can carry out the goals and desires of the late Ayatullah Qudd^{sa}, namely, knowledge, piety, Islamic etiquette, along with taking care of their wifely duties, raising pious children and promoting Islam.

¹ A title of respect, used in reference to her father 'All^{ma} Tab^{ataba}'¹

² An organization started by Shah^{id} Qudd^{sa} and Shah^{id} Beheshti that was particularly concerned with women's education and was involved in the founding of Jamiat al-Zahra, the largest women's seminary in Iran.

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