

Lesson 37: The Best Of All Women (Fatimatu 'z-Zahr')

Name: *Fatimah.*

Agnomen: *Umm Abiha.*

Title: *az-Zahr; as-Siddiqah; al-Bat; Sayyidatu 'n-Nis.*

Father: *Muhammad, the Messenger.*

Mother: *Khadijah, the Mother of the Believers.*

Birth: *20th Jumada 'th-Thani, 5th year after the Bi'hat.*

Death: *3rd Jumada 'th-Thani, 11 AH.*

1. Birth to Hijra

Fatimatu 'z-Zahr was born in the fifth year of the bi'hat and she was the only child who survived from among the children of Khadija. Fatima's birth and the fact that only she gave the Prophet grandchildren is itself a revolutionary statement: in the pre-Islamic society, the birth of a baby girl was considered a disgrace for the family; and lineage was only recognized through male children. When the male children of the Prophet and Khadija died in infancy, some of the unbelievers of Mecca taunted the Prophet saying that he is an *abtar* — a person who is cut off, that is, he has no progeny." In response to this taunting, Allah revealed chapter 108 of the Qur'an: "We have verily given to you (O Muhammad) plentiful [i.e., in the form of Fatima and her progeny]; therefore, pray to your Lord and offer sacrifice. Surely the one who taunts you is an *abtar*."

Fatima's life is intertwined with the emergence and growth of the Islamic movement. She was just three years old when her parents — the Prophet and Khadija — had to go with other family members to Abu Talib's castle outside Mecca when the Quraysh imposed an economic and social boycott against them. Soon after the boycott ended, at the age of five, Fatima lost her mother. She was thereafter brought up by the Prophet himself.

A famous incident from the Meccan period shows that Fātima, even in childhood, was part of her father's struggle. Once the Prophet was praying near the Ka'bah while a group of Qurayshi unbelievers were sitting and watching him. Abu Jahl, their leader, said, "Who amongst you can go and bring the intestine of a slaughtered camel and put it on Muhammad when he is in prostration?" 'Uqba bin Abi Mu'īt complied with the suggestion of Abu Jahl and placed the filthy intestine of a camel on the Prophet's shoulder when he was in the state of sajdah. The Prophet remained in that position while the unbelievers laughed so much so that they fell on each other. A passerby went to the Prophet's home and informed Fātima. Fātima, though still in her childhood, came running to the Ka'bah and removed the filth from the Prophet and cursed the unbelievers on their faces.

After the death of Khadija and Abu Tālib, life became most constrained and difficult for the Prophet and his followers in Mecca. When the Quraysh planned to kill the Prophet, he left Mecca and migrated to Medina, and thus began a new era in the history of Islam.

'Alī bin Abi Tālib had been left behind by the Prophet to mislead the enemies, to return the property of others entrusted to the Prophet, and also to bring the remaining members of the Prophet's immediate family to Medina. After accomplishing the tasks given to him, 'Alī started the journey towards Medina with three Fātimas: Fātima bint Asad ('Alī's mother), Fātima bint Zubayr ibn 'Abdul Muttalib (aunt of 'Alī and the Prophet), and Fātimatu 'z-Zahrā'.

The Prophet, who had left Mecca earlier, waited for 'Alī and his family at Quba on the outskirts of Medina. When Abu Bakr suggested that they enter the city of Medina, the Prophet refused to do so until his cousin and his beloved daughter reached him in Quba. And, indeed, the Prophet entered Medina only after those closest to him in family ties as well as in spiritual affiliation had joined him from Mecca!

2. Father & Daughter

After Khadija's death, the Prophet used to pay special attention to his daughter Fātima. Whenever he went on a journey, the last person to whom he would bade farewell was Fātima; and when he returned to Medina, the first person whom he would meet would be Fātima. Every day before going to bed, the Prophet would kiss the cheeks of his daughter and say a prayer for her.

When the verse "***Do not call the Prophet like the way you call one another***"(24:63) was revealed, even Fātima, like everyone else, started to address him as "O the Messenger of Allah" instead of saying "O Father!" After hearing Fātima calling him in this very formal manner, the Prophet said, "O Fātima, this verse does not apply to you or your children... You should still call me 'O Father' because it brightens my heart and pleases Allah."

3. Marriage to ‘Alī

Many proposals came for Fātima to the Prophet but he always rejected them saying that he was waiting for the divine commandment. Finally, ‘Alī bin Abi Tālib approached the Prophet for Fātima’s hand in marriage. The Prophet went inside the house and asked Fātima about ‘Alī’s proposal. Fātima just bowed her head in modesty. According to Umm Salama, the Prophet’s wife, “The face of Fātima bloomed with joy and her silence was so suggestive that the Prophet stood up saying ‘*Allāhu Akbar*, Fātima’s silence is her acceptance.”

The Prophet asked ‘Alī about the *mahr* (dowry; marriage gift given by the groom to the bride). ‘Alī said he just had three things from the possessions of this world: a sword, a shield and a camel which he used for watering the farms. The Prophet said that you need your sword for jihād and your camel for your livelihood, so go and sell the shield. ‘Alī sold the shield for about 500 dirhams and gave the money to the Prophet as *mahr*. The Prophet used a portion of the *mahr* to buy *jahīz* (the household necessities given to the bride by her family).

The *jahīz* of the Mistress of the Women consisted of the following: 1. a shirt, 2. a large veil, 3. a black plush cloak, 4. a bed, 5. two mattresses, one filled with wool and another with palm tree fiber, 6. four cushions stuffed with good smelling leaves, 7. a curtain made of wool, 8. a mat, 9. a few jugs and bowls, 10. waterbag made of leather, and a few other simple items.

This is how simple the marriage of ‘Alī and Fātima was! It should serve as a lesson for those who think that one must have “all” before making the decision of marriage!

4. Fātima’s Status in the Qur’ān & the Sunnah

Our Lady Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā’ (a.s.) stands on the highest pedestal of spiritual ranks. She is an integral part of many verses in the Qur’ān. The most important of those verses are the following:

1. The verse of purity: This is the verse in which Allah says: **“*Verily Allah intends to keep off from you, O Ahlu ‘l-bayt, all kinds of abomination, and to purify you (spiritually) a thorough purification.*” (33:33)** In spite of all the differences among the Muslims about those on whom this verse can be applied, no one has ever disputed the fact that Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā’ is part of it. She has been kept away from all abomination and impurities, thus rendering her an infallible and sinless person by the will of Allah, *subhanahu wa ta’ala*.

2. Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā’, ‘Alī, Hasan, Husayn and, their servant, Fizza, fasted for three days. At sunset on the first day, a beggar came to the door; next day, an orphan came to the door; and on the third day, a captive came to the door all asking for food. On all three days ‘Alī gave away his food — which consisted of one loaf of bread only— and others also followed his example even though they had nothing left for themselves. Allah was so much pleased with the selflessness and sincerity of Fātima and

her family that He revealed Chapter 76 of the Qur'ān highly praising them. **“And they give away food, out of love for Him, to the poor, the orphan and the captive; saying ‘We feed you only for God’s sake, we do not expect from you any recompense nor gratitude!’” (76:8–9)** After describing their reward in the paradise, Allah says: **“Verily, this is unto you a recompense, and your endeavour is appreciated.” (76:22)**

This verse, in reality, is Allah’s good tiding that Fātima and her family will surely have an honourable place in Paradise.

3. In the ninth year of the hijrah when the Christian scholars and leaders from Yemen came to see the Prophet, they refused to agree with his logical arguments against Jesus being the “Son of God”. Then Allah ordered (3:54) the Prophet to challenge the Christians for malediction¹ and to bring themselves, their women and their children as partners in this event.

The Prophet of Islam, on his side, took ‘Alī (as representing “yourselves”), Hasan and Husayn (as representing “your children”), and Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā (as representing “your women”). Not that there were no other women in Medina; no, there were many: his wives, relatives and women of his companions. But he just selected Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā because she alone was sufficient to stand by the Messenger of Allah in praying against the Christians.

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There are many sayings from the Prophet about Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā. For instance, he said, “The best women of Paradise are Khadija bint Khuwaylid, Fātima bint Muhammad, Maryam bint ‘Imrān and ‘Īsiya bint Muzāhim the wife of Fir’awn.” (al-Hākim in *Mustadrak ‘ala ‘s-Sahihayn*.) ‘Īsha, the wife of the Prophet, narrates another hadith that once the Prophet welcomed Fātima and told her a secret which she disclosed only after the Prophet’s death. In that statement, the Prophet said to Fātima: “...Do not you like to be the mistress of all the ladies of Paradise or the mistress of all the lady believers?” (al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*.) There a third very famous saying of the Prophet about Fātima which has also been quoted by al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*: “Verily Fātima is a part of me; whosoever makes her angry, makes me angry.”

These remarks cannot be seen just in the context of “father–daughter” relationship; it throws light on the spiritual status of Fātima. After all, the Prophet **“does not talk from his own accord; [whatever he says is] nothing except a revelation which is revealed to him.” (53:3–4)**

5. After the Prophet

One of the darkest pages of Muslim history consists of the events which took place after the Prophet’s death. These events directly affected our Lady Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā (a.s.).

When Abu Bakr was installed as the caliph, members of the Prophet’s family and some companions

refrained from pledging allegiance to him. This small group sought refuge with ‘Alī inside his home. The supporter of the caliph, led by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, forcefully entered the house of ‘Alī and brought the men out to the mosque where they were compelled to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr. In the process of forcing the door open, they broke the door which fell upon Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā, injuring her severely and causing the loss of her unborn baby.

Fadak was a property in northern Arabia which the Prophet had gifted to Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā. But after his death, the caliphate establishment confiscated the property of Fadak. When Fātima complained against this injustice, the caliph quoted an alleged saying of the Prophet that, “We the prophets do not leave anything as inheritance [for our children]; whatever we leave behind is charity.” Fātima challenged the validity of this so-called hadīth by reciting verses from the Qur’ān in which Allah describes how the children of past prophets inherited their fathers! However, political expediency took precedence over truth and honesty. This was the first attack on the rights of women in Islam, and Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā was the first Muslim woman to stand up for her rights.

Fātima also stood by ‘Alī in defending his right for the caliphate. ‘Alī used to take her at night to the houses of the Ansār where she would address the women in support for ‘Alī’s right to the caliphate.

The physical hurt of the door falling upon her and the loss of her unborn baby combined with the emotional pain of ‘Alī’s deprivation and the confiscation of Fadak took its toll on Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā — she left this world at the age of 18.

‘Alī, who had just lost the Prophet three months ago, also lost his faithful wife. These were the loneliest days for ‘Alī bin Abi Tālib. Hasan, Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum lost their loving and caring mother. And the Muslim world lost the best of all women.

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This lesson has been written by Sayyid M. Rizvi.

Sources used for this lesson are: 1. *Bīnu-e Banawwān* of Dar Rah-e Haq. 2. *Sahih al-Bukhari*. 3. *Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā’* of S. M. Kazim al-Qazwini.

Question Paper on Lesson 37

Question 1: [20 points]

Fill in the blanks from the list of words given below:

Fātimatu ‘z-Zahrā’ was born in the _____ year of the _____. At the age of _____ she lost her mother and thereafter was raised by the Prophet. The Prophet waited for Fātima(s) and ‘Alī at _____.

The mahr of Fātima was _____ dirhams and the jahiz was simple. Fātima is the undisputed embodiment of the verse of _____. In verse ____ : ____, Allah has informed us about the honourable

place of Fātima and her family in Paradise. In the words of the Prophet, “Verily Fātima is a part of me; whosoever makes her _____, makes me angry.

The property gifted by the Prophet to Fātima and confiscated by the caliphate is known as _____. She died at the age of _____.

Fidak fifth

500 angry

five purity

18 76:22

Quba bi`that

Question 2: [15 points]

True or False:

- (a) Abtar means one who has no progeny.
- (b) Fatima is one of the five best women of Paradise mentioned by the Prophet.
- (c) Husayn was the eldest child of Fatima.
- (d) The order of malediction is mentioned in 3:54.
- (e) Whatever the prophets leave behind is charity.

Question 3: [15 points]

Explain in your own words as to what aspects of Fātimatu 'z-Zahra's life can be an example and model for the Muslim women of our time.

1. An event in which both parties pray to God for sending His curse upon the liars.

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