

## Personality

Lady Zaynab contained all elements of nobility and virtue that Almighty Allah bestowed upon her grandfather, her father, her mother, and her two brothers. She inherited their peculiarities and copied their high moral standards.

By virtue of her ethical inheritance and unmatched characteristics, Lady Zaynab is indeed the greatest lady in Islam as she symbolises its true values and principles. Along with her mother, Lady Zaynab struggled in the best way and stood firmly against the factional currencies that tried, using all their possibilities and powers, to throw curtains on the real leaders and guides of the Islamic ummah.

In the same way as Lady Fatimah al-Zahra stopped strongly with Imam Ali (a) and opposed the illegal government of Abu Bakr through her splendid speech as well as her honorable situations, Lady Zaynab stopped to the last spark of life with her brother, Imam al-Husayn (a) and opposed the black government of the Umayyad rulers who aimed, openly and frankly, at uprooting Islam and erasing its existence by excluding the Ahl al-Bayt (a) from the Muslims' social and political lives.

Let us now refer to some of such peculiarities that made Lady Zaynab at the head of Muslim women:

### [Faith](#)

In the center from where call to Almighty Allah was raised, and the house where the revelation of Divine Message had descended, and the pivot from which the word of monotheism advanced to spread its bright rays to all the peoples on this earth – it was in this very house that Lady Zaynab was brought up. She was fed with the core of true faith and the reality of Islam. Hence, love for Almighty Allah was in her nature and, later on, became a distinctive feature of her personality that led her to stand up to all the misfortunes and adversities she had to encounter from her early life.

Firm faith and exclusive devotion to Almighty Allah were the features that Prophet Muhammad's family enjoyed in a special way. Each member of this exalted family expressed his/her firm faith distinctively. Lady Zaynab, for instance, stopped at the severed body of her brother, Imam al-Husayn (a), and expressed her firm faith by saying:

اللَّهُمَّ تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا هَذَا الْقُرْبَانَ

“O Allah, accept this offering from us.”

These words have been the best example on the sublimity of the prophetic inheritance. They also showed the reality of Islam through the lesson that each sacrifice must be purely offered for Almighty Allah’s sake.

Humanity, in all ages, must bow before such unparalleled faith, which was the secret beyond the perpetuity of Lady Zaynab and her principles.

On the cruelest night in the life of Lady Zaynab, as well as the Islamic ummah, she offered a Thanksgiving Prayer while she was completely surrounded by horrific tragedies; the dead bodies of the Prophet’s family and their pure companions were thrown before her eyes without shrouds, fire leaped across the canopies of the Alawid ladies who lost their shelter after the savage and merciless soldiers had usurped their jewelries and properties, and the children had nothing to do other than weeping and crying. In the midst of this appalling situation, Lady Zaynab turned her face towards her Lord to thank Him for His grace.

Indeed, such faith is more perpetual than civilizations, fortunes, and even perpetuity itself.

## Steadfastness

Since early life, Lady Zaynab had equipped herself with steadfastness against misfortunes. She first was deprived of her grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (S), who loved her very much and sympathized with her. She then saw the horrible events that surprised her parents immediately after the Prophet’s demise. Her father was taken away from the position that Almighty Allah and Prophet Muhammad (S) chose for him. Her mother was severely mistreated by the people until she departed life while she was in the flush of her youth. She then saw people of Kufa cheat her brother, Imam al-Hasan (a), and let him down to the degree that he had to make a peace treaty with Muawiyah, the mortal enemy of Islam and the Ahl al-Bayt (a). A few years later, this Imam was assassinated by poison. She saw him vomit blood to death.

On the tenth of Muharram, 61 AH, she had to see the most bitter of adversities; her brother, Imam al-Husayn (a), yielded to death after he had lost all supporters and helpers; the swords of the wicked Umayyad soldiers killed the Alawid youths, children, and even babies. Lady Zaynab stood like an unshakable mountain in face of all these unbearable misfortunes. She faced all these with the weapon of steadfastness and resisted all the events with conviction. Thus, she is intended in Almighty Allah’s saying:

وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ. أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ...

***“And give good news to the patient who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah’s and to Him we shall surely return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord.” (2: 155–7)***

Many poets have depicted Lady Zaynab’s steadfastness in a most beautiful and expressive way. She being the Prophet’s granddaughter, showed steadfastness and endurance before the enemies of Allah. Lady Zaynab could withstand all adversities and misfortunes by virtue of her determination and persistence.

## **Dignity**

Dignity was a prominent feature in the personality of Lady Zaynab.

After the killing of Imam al–Husayn (a), she as well as the other granddaughters of the Prophet (S) were taken as captives from Karbala to Kufa and all their personal properties were usurped. While the children were harshly afflicted with hunger, she desisted from asking the soldiers of the Umayyad army for some food. When the captives’ caravan arrived in Kufa, and the women there knew that the captives belonged to the Prophet’s family, they hurried to bring some food for the children. Preventing this thing, Lady Zaynab spoke to the ladies of Kufa:

الصَّدَقَةُ مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْنَا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ

“It is forbidden for us, the Ahl al–Bayt, to receive from the alms.”

When the children heard these words from their aunt, they threw away from their hands and mouths all that they had accepted from these ladies and preferred hunger to accepting alms that was forbidden for them. This was the fruit of education by the choicest ones; the prophets, the veracious, and their real followers.

All along the journey of the captives, from Kufa to Damascus, Lady Zaynab did not ask for any aids for the children and women even though they were in dire need for such, because of her disdain and sense of honor.

Thus, Lady Zaynab did not succumb to any other than Almighty Allah. She showed dignity, honor, and disdain inherited from her grandfather and father in spite of her hardships.

## **Courage**

No one can ever doubt the courage of the Prophet’s family. The members of this family gave the best

examples of bravery and courage. For instance, Imam Ali (a), the head of the Prophet's family, said:

“Even if all the Arabs helped each other to fight with me, I will never flee.”

He showed the best sort of courage during the battles and campaigns of Islam. His son Imam al-Husayn (a) also gave the best example of bravery and courage. On the day of Ashura, he amazed his enemies and could stop so bravely and steadfastly before their great numbers. Despite the horrifying misfortunes that he had to encounter on that day, he did not show any surrender or weakness. On the contrary, his steadfastness increased with the increase of his misfortunes. He alone attacked thirty thousand soldiers and could oblige them to turn the backs just like goats that run away from a lion. Even when he fell to the ground out of his heavy wounds, they were too scared to approach him.

Following her family members pattern, Lady Zaynab behaved so courageously before the criminals who killed her brother. When she had to stop before Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, while she was considered as captive, she expressed despise and disrespect for him. He therefore showed his gloating over her misfortunes by saying, “Thanks to Allah Who unmasked, killed, and belied your revolution.”

In reply, she said courageously:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَكْرَمَنَا بِنَبِيِّهِ، وَطَهَّرَنَا مِنَ الرَّجْسِ تَطْهِيراً. إِنَّمَا يُفْتَضِحُ الْفَاسِقُ وَيُكْذِبُ الْفَاجِرُ، وَهُوَ غَيْرُنَا، وَهُوَ  
غَيْرُنَا يَا بِنَ مَرْجَانَةَ...

Thanks to Allah Who honored us with His Prophet and purified us from uncleanness thoroughly. It is only the lewd that has been unmasked, and it is only the dissolute that has been belied. We are not any of these two. Indeed, we are not any of these two, O son of Marjanah [1](#). [2](#)

This statement in fact was more lethal than strike of weapons. She said it while she, as well as other ladies of the Prophet's family, were in captivity and the heads of their protectors were resting on spearheads.

It was these words that also took the tyrant down from his throne into his grave. To hear these words from her in presence of his servants and officials, made him realize in fact it was he who was the real defeated and the unmasked one, while the real triumph belonged to Imam al-Husayn (a), the killed one and his companions.

When he heard these shocking words, Ubaydullah, son of Marjanah, had nothing to say. He therefore spoke to inflict pain in his attempt to cover failure and inability to answer. He addressed her and asked, “How do you see that which Allah has done to your brother?”

Bravely and steadfastly, Lady Zaynab answered with words of triumph:

مَا رَأَيْتُ إِلَّا جَمِيلاً. هُوَ لَاءِ قَوْمٍ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَتْلَ فَبَرَزُوا إِلَى مَضَاجِعِهِمْ، وَسَيَجْمَعُ اللَّهُ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُمْ فَتُحَاجُّ  
وَتُخَاصِمُ. فَاَنْظُرْ لِمَنِ الْفَلَجُ يَوْمَئِذٍ. تَكَلَّمْتَ أُمُّكَ يَا بِنَ مَرْجَانَةَ

I see nothing but His Grace. These were those who were destined for being martyred. They therefore came to the place where they would be slain. Allah will gather you with them for judgment and sentence. You will see then, who will be the triumphant on that day. Woe shall be you, son of Marjanah, then.

These words were surely a source of gratification, not only for Lady Zaynab, but also for Islam and Muslims. They are also regarded to eternally glorify the Prophet's family.

The circumstances that faced Lady Zaynab with the Syrian man, in the royal place of Yazid and her everlasting revolutionary speech, shook the Umayyad throne and revealed the baseless reality of Yazid and those who had enabled him to come to power. In the coming chapters, these situations will be discussed in details.

### **Abstention from worldly pleasures**

Following her father who had shunned the worldly pleasures relentlessly<sup>3</sup> and her mother who possessed nothing other than a rug made of leaves of date–palm trees and a skin of an ewe, Lady Zaynab abandoned all the worldly pleasures and stuck to Almighty Allah and deeds of charity. She had never saved anything for tomorrow. <sup>4</sup>

She left everything when accompanying her brother, Imam al–Husayn (a), even though she was the wife of the wealthiest man of Medina; all this was to support her religion and defend its principles and values.

### **Firmness**

Lady Zaynab confronted the tyrants so firmly that she represented the strength of right and the justice perfectly. In all situations, she replied the tyrants courageously and faced their falsity with words of light that have perpetuated and acted as models of stopping against any tyrant for sake of the right and justice.

While the soldiers and the courtiers whom Yazid had invited to witness his false victory surrounded her, Lady Zaynab fearlessly countered each and every single word that Yazid said until she completely unmasked him and proved the genuineness of his brother's issue. Moreover, she threatened and showered the tyrant with severe words of rebuke as if she was the governor and he was the captive. Referring to verses from the Holy Quran and items of logic, she did not leave any argument to the tyrant. Her words were like swords that struck Yazid and his likes to death.

The same thing she did before the other tyrant, Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad who tried to gloat at her about misfortunes, but all his attempts were rebuffed by sharp words and a style that obliged him to become silent. She ignored him completely and that was enough shame for him.

Her intrepidity was clear all through the journey with her brother and afterwards when she took up various honorable roles in his undying revolution. She managed the affairs of Imam with nonesuch activity despite the enemies' siege. A single look at the bright face of her brother would remove any tiredness she might have felt.

She also took care of the children and harem after the Imam's martyrdom, and that was really a hard mission that ordinary women cannot manage. The source of such power and firmness was that she understood Imam al-Husayn's revolution perfectly and exerted all efforts for giving success to it.

These have been some features of the unmatched personality of Lady Zaynab. As a matter of fact, this lady's personality included all features of moral highness and perfection. To refer to all these features requires great efforts and very much time, though Lady Zaynab's features are timeless. This is the reason why only a few features of her personality have been mentioned here.

## Lady Zaynab in Traditions

For her high position, Lady Zaynab was mentioned in a number of traditions ascribed to the Holy Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt (a). We have already referred to the Prophet's saying that weeping for her is the same as weeping for her two brothers.

Shaykh Sulayman al-Hanafi in his famous book entitled *Yanabi al-Mawaddah Section 58*, records the following – we excerpt only the point of discussion:

Rabiah al-Sadi reported: As I asked Hudhayfah about a number of matters, he said, "Listen to this, understand it, and convey it to people. I have seen the Messenger of Allah and heard him say with my own ears that when al-Husayn ibn Ali came to him on the minbar and he seated him on his shoulders and said:

O people! This is al-Husayn; his grandfather and grandmother are the best of people. His grandfather is the Messenger of Allah and master of Adam's descendants... And this is al-Husayn whose father, mother, brother, and sisters are the best of people... and his sisters are Zaynab and Ruqayyah... and his two sisters shall be in Paradise...[5](#)

This prophetic saying is a clear-cut proof on the exceptional position of Lady Zaynab as she is added to the list of Prophet and the Imams and is regarded as the best of people.

Shaykh al-Saduq in his *Ikmal al-Din wa Itmam al-Nimah*, reports the following – we excerpt only the point of discussion:

Ali ibn Mahziyar said that Abu al-Husayn Muhammad ibn Jafar al-Asadi said that Ahmad ibn Ibrahim said:

In the year 262, I visited (Lady) Hakimah daughter of Muhammad ibn Ali and sister of Imam al-Hasan al-Askari, and asked her about the religion... She then said, "This is what al-Husayn ibn Ali had done when he appointed his sister Zaynab as his representative openly, and hence any item of knowledge that was said by Ali ibn al-Husayn was ascribed to Zaynab."

This is another proof on the high position of Lady Zaynab in the sight of Imam al-Husayn as he appointed her to carry the weighty inheritance of Imamate.

Shaykh al-Mufid records the following narration:

During the Battle of the Camel, Aishah gathered children and bondmaids, gave them drums, and ordered them to chant some poetic verses against Imam Ali. When Ummu Salamah, the Prophet's widow, was informed about this, she decided to go there and reproach Aishah and the gathering women. Lady Zaynab asked to do this instead of Ummu Salamah since she knew these women very well. Hence, she disguised herself and her bondmaids and left towards these children and women. When she reached there, she noticed their vainness and futility. She then showed her reality to Aishah and said, "It is not strange from you and your companion (i.e. Hafsah) to help each other against Amir al-Muminin, since it was both of you who helped each other against his brother, the Messenger of Allah, until you were reproached by the Holy Quran."<sup>6</sup> Aishah felt ashamed and excused that these women had done this out of their ignorance.

This tradition gives a clear idea about the sagacity and wisdom of Lady Zaynab who participated in the defense of Islam with her father and brothers.

The following tradition is recorded in *al-Tiraz al-Mudhahhab* as quoted from *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*:

One of the miracles of the Holy Prophet (S) was that he used to put his tongue in the mouths of Fatimah's suckling children and they were satiated. Zaynab and Ummu Kulthum were also engaged in receiving this blessing besides al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

This narration is in fact a sufficient honor for Lady Zaynab.

The following is recorded in *Bihar al-Anwar*, as quoted from *Maani al-Akhbar*:

Muhammad ibn Imran asked Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a) whether it is true that the Holy Prophet (S) had said that because Fatimah guarded her chastity, Allah would forbid Hell to take in her progeny. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "Yes, it is true. Her progeny are al-Hasan, al-Husayn, Zaynab, and Ummu Kulthum."

The previous are only small excerpts of the traditions in which Lady Zaynab is mentioned. It has been already mentioned that she herself was a trustworthy narrator of prophetic traditions and incidents that she lived or heard from her mother.

## Traditions of Lady Zaynab

The most famous narration of Lady Zaynab was her mother's address of Fadak.

Ibn Abu al-Hadid, in *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, reports this address from a series of narrators, all of whom relate it to Lady Zaynab in more than one way. Abdullah ibn Abbas also relates the address to Lady Zaynab.<sup>7</sup> She also narrated her father's last words to her two brothers and his instructions on how to wash his dead body and where to bury him. She also narrated the story of Imam al-Husayn's birth, as quoted from her mother (a).<sup>8</sup>

Lady Zaynab also narrated the story of the Heavenly Food that Lady Fatimah al-Zahra prayed to the Lord to give her so as to serve it to her father<sup>9</sup>. She also narrated the famous story of her mother's prayer to the believers saying, "Neighbors should be preceded to the family members."<sup>10</sup>

She also narrated to her nephew, Imam Zayn al-Abidin, the words of the Holy Prophet about what they would face after him.<sup>11</sup> In the same manner, she narrated her father's confirmation of Ummu Ayman's narration about the same matter.

<sup>1</sup>. Marjanah – Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad's mother, was a notorious prostitute that everybody all over the Islamic State had heard of her name.

<sup>2</sup>. See Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*; 6:263.

<sup>3</sup>. This is an indication to Imam Ali's famous word:

"O world. O world! Get away from me. Why do you present yourself to me? Or are you eager for me? You may not get that opportunity to impress me. Deceive some other person. I have no concern with you. I have divorced you thrice whereafter there is no restitution. Your life is short, your importance is little, and your liking is humble. Alas! The provision is little, the way is long, the journey is far and the goal is hard to reach."

<sup>4</sup>. Imam Ali Zayn al-Abidin (a) narrated this feature about his aunt, Lady Zaynab. See al-Timothy's *al-Sahih*; 2:319, al-Hakim's *al-Mustadrak*; 3: 149, Ibn al-Athir's *Usd al-Ghabah*; 5:523, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's *Tarikh Baghdad*; 7:366, and others.

<sup>5</sup>. This hadith is reported by Abu al-Shaykh Ibn Hayyan in *al-Tanbih al-Kabir* and is also recorded by Jamaluddin Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Zarandi in *Durar al-Simtayn*.

<sup>6</sup>. The story of Aishah and Hafsah's having hatched plots against the Holy Prophet (S) is very famous, since it is mentioned in the Holy Quran in details. See all books of tafsir regarding the surah of al-Tahrim.

<sup>7</sup>. See Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*.

<sup>8</sup>. See al-Khazzaz, *Kifayat al-Athar*.

<sup>9</sup>. See Imaduddin Muhammad ibn Ali al-Tusi, *Thaqib al-Manaqib*.

<sup>10</sup>. See Shaykh Ahmad Zaynuddin al-Ihsaie, *al-Majami*.

<sup>11</sup>. See Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kamil al-Ziyarah*.