

Womanhood

Zaynab [a.s.] grew into a fine statured young woman. Of her physical appearance little is known.

When the tragedy of Karbala befell her in her mid-fifties she was forced to go out uncovered. It was then that some people remarked that she appeared as a 'shining sun' and a 'piece of the moon'.

In her character she reflected the best attributes of those who raised her. In sobriety and serenity she was likened to Umm ul-Mu'minin Khadija, her grandmother [a.s.]; in chastity and modesty to her mother Fatima Zahra [a.s.]; in eloquence to her father Ali [a.s.]; in forbearance and patience to her brother Imam Hasan [a.s.]; and in bravery and tranquility of the heart to Imam Husayn [a.s.]. Her face reflected her father's awe and her grandfather's reverence.

When the time came for marriage, she was married in a simple ceremony to her first cousin, Abdullah ibn Ja'far Tayyar. Abdullah had been brought up under the direct care of the Prophet [s.a.w.]. After his death, Imam Ali [a.s.] became his supporter and guardian until he came of age. He grew up to be a handsome youth with pleasing manners and was known for his sincere hospitality to guests and selfless generosity to the poor and needy.

Together this young couple had five children, of whom four were sons, Ali, Aun, Muhammad, and Abbas, and one daughter, Umm Kulthum.

In Medina it was Zaynab's practise to hold regular meetings for women in which she shared her knowledge and taught them the precepts of the Deen of Islam as laid out in the Holy Qur'an. Her gatherings were well and regularly attended. She was able to impart the teachings with such clarity and eloquence that she became known as Fasihah (skillfully fluent) and Balighah (intensely eloquent).

In the thirty-seventh year A.H. (after Hijrah), Imam Ali [a.s.] moved to Kufa to finally take up his rightful position as khalifah. He was accompanied by his daughter Zaynab [a.s.] and her husband.

Her reputation as an inspiring teacher among the women had preceded her. There too women would throng to her daily sittings where they all benefited from her erudition, wisdom and scholarship in the exegesis of the Qur'an.

The depth and certainty of her knowledge earned her the name given to her by her nephew, Imam Ali Zayn ul-Abidin [a.s.], of '*Alimah Ghayr Mu'allamah*, she who has knowledge without being taught.

Zaynab [a.s.] was also nicknamed Zahidah (abstemious) and 'Abidah (devoted) because of her abstemiousness and piety. She found little of interest in worldly adornments, always preferring the bliss and comfort of the Next World over that of this world. She used to say that for her the life of this world was as a resting place to relieve fatigue along a journey. Humble and of high morals, her main concern was to strive to please Allah and in doing so she avoided anything which was the least bit doubtful.

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