

Woman's Dignity in the Words of Amir ul-Muminin Ali ibn Abi Talib

An Interview with Abbas Ali Shameli

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Introduction

The personality and statements of His Holiness Ali (P) indicate his brilliance and magnanimity. Ali (P) is a personality belonging to an era further beyond his own era the horizon of his outlook traverses the boundaries and narrow passes of the materialistic approach and the more science progresses, the more his impressive statements excel. His Holiness Ali (P), as a great Islamic personality has illustrated the exalted status of a Muslim woman. One can find out the comprehensiveness of woman's status and dignity in his lofty ideals as indicated in his eloquent statements and way of living with the Eminence Zahra (P).

Undoubtedly, different social events have occurred throughout history pushing the perspective of His Holiness Ali (P) concerning women's status into a halo of ambiguity many things have been left unsaid and questions raised. We have conducted an interview with Dr. Shameli to present a response to such ambiguities and state some dimensions of His Holiness Ali's (P) line of thought, as well.

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What is the role of married life and that of housekeeping from His Holiness Ali's (P) point of view?

The importance of man and woman's role in family life is considered one of the ambiguous subjects at present. What is the role of married life and that of housekeeping from His Holiness Ali's (P) point of view?

In Imam Ali's (P) opinion, the issue of Holy War (jihad) is the most important feature of women's role, which is at the same level as that of men's. In Islamic culture, jihad is the highest degree of readiness and receptivity of the personality of a Muslim. However, according to this statement of Imam Ali (P), jihad is not specified only to men but to the woman, too. She has her own jihad and can perform a role of the same level as men's jihad. Without doubt, the ground for activating this role has roots inside the family. Imam Ali's (P) states:

جهاد المرأة حسن التبعل

“A woman's jihad (as a wife) is having good behavior towards the husband¹”.

This message is related only to the relation of woman with her husband however, woman's relation is not limited only to her husband but inside the family she has relations with the children and relatives too. Nevertheless, the value and status of woman's good conduct and treatment towards her husband is similar to her presence in the battlefield for jihad.

In general, other roles of woman are related to the affairs of everyday life. With this statement, one comes to think that such obedience might result in the erosion of woman's personality and instilling within her passivity and indiscriminate submission to the husband but the meaning of having good attitude and treatment towards the husband and the evidences of good conduct can be found in Her Eminence Zahra's (P) remarks and testament on His Holiness Ali (P), the testament which is in fact an explanation of “good treatment”. Her Eminence Zahra (P) tells her husband:

«يا بن عمّ ماعهدتني كاذبة ولا خائنة ولا خالفتك منذ عاشرتني»

“O cousin, have you observed any lie, treachery or opposition from my part, during our marital life? I mean, during our marital life, can you mention the time when I have told a lie, an instance of disloyalty or a remark which I have expressed opposition²?”

This remark indicates that good conduct of a woman revolves around the three following pivots:

1. Shows honesty in her behavior and speech towards her husband and never tells a lie.
2. Shows loyalty with regards to property, chastity and reputation and faithfulness and demonstrates her sincerity and loyalty regarding property and chastity.
3. Never makes life bitter for her and her husband with opposition and discord of any kind.

Remarkably, His Holiness Ali (P) following the enumeration of these three pivots, states:

!معاذ الله

فقال (ع): معاذ الله انت اعلم و ابرّ و اتقي و اكرم و اشد خوفاً من الله ان او يخك

بمخالفتي.

"I seek refuge in Allah. O, my wife you are of a higher position to tell such words, you are more knowledgeable, more righteous, pious and magnanimous in relation to the divine obligations and your fear of God is to an extent that prevents you from having such deficiencies in your personality³."

Comparing the two sides of this narration, one can find out that a person can tell no lie, commit no treachery and wrongdoing if he/she is cognizant of God, in other words, has awareness of divine rules and religion, possess conviction with regards to God and His religion. Such a personality is concerned of God's Justice and Fairness regarding piety and behavioral control.

His Holiness Ali (P) in reply to the question, "What is your experience during the 9 years of living with Her Eminence Zahra (P)?" states:

و الله لا اغضبيني اذلتني و لا عصت لي امرأ

"She never makes me angry and never disobeys my command at all."

Her Eminence Zahra (P) had such knowledge of the personality of His Holiness Ali (P) that he had devoted her life to the stability of his guardianship though it may seem that she had devoted her life to her husband. Of course, there might be two spouses, who being as one with each other, sincerely offer whatever they have to each other but Her Eminence Fatimah (P) not only did this but also was concerned of the strengthening of His Holiness Ali's guardianship.

What we want to present here is a real illustration of the pure Imams' (P) statements, we must not judge according to our own interests. If there are some points raised regarding woman's personality, there are some points mentioned regarding men, too. Any obligation and commandment in Islam first of all, is addressed to His Holiness Ali (P) and Her Eminence Fatimah (P). In some instances, the obligations assigned to them may be more burdensome than that assigned to other people. It was so for the Holy Prophet (P) when the verse was revealed:

«من الليل فتهجد نافلة لك»

"At night, wake up and pray during it as an extra bonus for yourself."

The Holy Prophet (P) was the first one who must do the very Divine Commandment for he is considered an example and role model. In view of that, His Holiness Ali (P) describing infallibility as one of his own attributes states:

انكم لا تقدرون علي ذلك ولكن اعينوني بورع

"You can never be like me, however, assist me through piety".

Some claim that they are Imams and have specific knowledge and others state that the concept of a woman as presented in Imam Ali's remarks is too idealistic and it may be unachievable in real life however, it must be taken

into consideration that they are witnesses of God, they are examples and proofs who will testify in the Hereafter. Unfortunately, in discussing woman's personality it is said that woman should be like this and like that, she should not disobey and so on failing to see the other side of the coin. There are some people who relate to obligations of the spouse according to their own interests, rationalizing the rules of Islam to their own advantage.

The management inside the family and responsible supervision over the internal affairs of the family is another clear and distinct role of a Muslim woman. The Chief of the Faithful, Ali (P), quoting from the Holy Prophet (P) states: "One of the points of

كلكم راع و كلكم مسئول عن رعيته

"All of you should be a shepherd towards your flock."

Refers to the woman's role and responsibility initiated inside the family. His Holiness states in this regard:

والمرأة راعية علي بيت زوجها و هي مسئولة

"The woman is the supervisor and the one responsible inside the house, in the family and in relation with her husband."

Therefore, the supervision over the sphere of the family assigned to the spouse (wife) is considered one of the clear and obvious proofs of general supervision. Through this supervision, tensions inside the family will fade away and the ground for a sound life will be paved as well.

The ideal personality for a Muslim woman from Imam Ali's (P) point of view is different from the concept of a woman's personality of a woman at present. What are the virtues of a woman's personality from the Islamic point of view?

In His Holiness Ali's (P) words, the best elements of a Muslim woman's personality which are considered at the same time the worst for men, are as follows:

خيار خصال النساء شرار خصال الرجال، الزهو و الجبن و البخل، فاذا كانت المرأة مزهوءة لم تمكن من نفسها و اذا كانت بخيلة حفظت مالها و مال بعلها و اذا كانت جبانة فرقت من

كل شئ يعرض لها.

(زهو) (Zahv means inviolability that is a woman must be inviolable in her social activities and her sense of pride should be dominant over her predisposition⁴.)

If a woman were inviolable, she would never allow a stranger to have authority over herself and if woman were niggardly, she would take care of the economy of the family and if a woman were timid she would never be involved with things that would be a threat to her chastity. However, in the field of education and training it is said that a person should be extrovert, have social communications and seek for a brethren in religion and must never fear.

If these three elements of the personality of a woman, which have been mentioned according to Imam Ali's (P) perspective, seem unusual, more explanation and interpretation are required. These elements, which endanger

woman and put her in a predicament are of two states, the general and particular here, the particular state is mentioned. Such destructive characteristics in both woman and man are not desirable in the general state, since Islam endeavors to educate human beings who are free from arrogance, fear and pride.

So, Imam Ali (P) does not consider the elements of pride and inviolability in its general state however, inviolability has a different meaning from pride. Inviolability means that Islam has defined a structure for a woman's personality. According to educational and training standards, a woman must be extrovert and be able to relate with others easily and if she could not relate with the opposite sex, she may have reservations with the opposite sex, while according to Islam, a woman must observe a boundary in her social responsibilities.

Regarding the characteristic of niggardly, its general state is considered as well. When the Holy Qur'an states:

وَمَنْ يُوقَ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ...

"Those who are shielded from their own avarice will be prosperous."
(59:9)

So the praiseworthiness of these characteristics is referred to in the particular state. The martyr, Professor Motahhari, regarding disapproval of these three characteristics for women by some individuals, states: "Are the moral characteristics relative and are they for men in one dimension and for women in another dimension? Does this subject indicate that these characteristics are relative or has the role of man been separated from the role of woman, according to Imam Ali's (P) speech?"

In fact, Imam Ali (P) aims to state the attitudes, which are the outcomes of those characteristics but not the qualities of personality. For instance, when God states:

الله يستهزء بهم

"Allah will throw back their mockery on them."

How can God ascribe that characteristic to Himself? Or when He states: "If a servant requests something three times from God, he/she will be addressed at the third time that God is ashamed of His servant".

If such passive and reprehensible characteristics would be in the personality, how can the Exalted God deserve these characteristics? Consequently, in these instances what is referred to is the manner of Dominion and Sovereignty of God. His Holiness Ali (P) discarding such an incorrect concept through the analysis and interpretation of his words, states:

فاذا كانت المرأة مزهوة لم تتمكن من نفسها

"If a woman continually observe a boundary and certain precautions in her own social relations, she will never be exploited and vulnerable.

لم تتمكن نفساً

"She never allows herself to be misused."

فاذا كانت بخيله

"If she has the characteristic of stinginess....."

حفظت مالها و مال بعلها

".. she will safeguard her own property, that of her marital life and also that of her husband."

فاذا كانت جبانة فرقت شيعى يعرض لها

"If a woman be concerned, in social interactions she will have fright and together with precaution and apprehension driving away many calamities and contention as well."

Nevertheless, Imam Ali (P) considers the best characteristics of women as the worst attributes of man pointing out that from the Islamic point of view the role and position of woman is completely different from that of man in marital life. The nature and personality of woman had been created in a manner that is compatible with such characteristics and virtues.

The martyr, Motahhari states: "The reason why the characteristics mentioned in this narration are not considered in general, in its absolute state and include particular instances, is that regarding stinginess, if its general state is mentioned, it will be incompatible with the certainties of the Holy Qur'an. The verse:

وَمَنْ يُوقِ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ...

"Those who are shielded from their own avarice will be prosperous."
(59:9)

Considers the element of prosperity as the point opposite to stinginess. It is expected of a woman to be proud towards strangers and not towards the husband, other women and/or her relatives close to her. What is focused upon is the pride in order to safeguard chastity and perform social responsibilities.

According to the above-mentioned verse, obsession of this world is condemned and one who can rescue oneself from this obsession and free oneself from worship of worldly matters or wealth will reach the stage of prosperity. So, it is not the best characteristic for a woman not to spend out of her property. Her Eminence Zahra, (P) as an example did not have stinginess in its general state. Stinginess is for the purpose of:

المرأة راعية علي بيت اهلها

"The woman is the supervisor and the one responsible inside the house, in the family and in relation with her husband."

As I have mentioned, Islam considers some characteristics favorable to woman, which are undesirable for man. Definitely, the general state of these characteristics because of its incompatibility with the certainties of the Holy Qur'an is not desired. The preference and encouragement of the characteristics of pride fear and stinginess is because of the vulnerability of woman. Stinginess and niggardliness is for the conjugal property according to Imam Ali (P) who states:

اذا كانت بخيلة حفظت مالها و مال بعلها

"Of course, both woman and man are responsible to safeguard conjugal property."

The woman has an essence called chastity, which is vulnerable in social interactions therefore, she must possess a characteristic required to guard this vulnerability. Throughout history nowhere has it been mentioned that a woman violated a man, on the contrary, there have been so many cases regarding violations against woman.

Therefore, fear is for safeguarding the chastity of a woman and encouraging to have this characteristic is observing precaution. Accordingly, perseverance and sensitivity in defending chastity as the basis of personality and complement of woman's dignity has been recommended to her.

The Martyr Motahhari states: "A woman's fear in the position of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong is condemned. The verse:

المؤمنون و المؤمنات بعضهم اولياء بعض يامرون بالمعروف و ينهون عن المنكر

"Some men believers and women believers are superior over the other believers they command decency and forbid dishonor."

Considers woman and man as partners and equal in enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong. To safeguard values it is said that one has to offer one's wealth or life unless it may cost your chastity. So fear has meaning only in this point. Where it is stated "enjoin the good", it says:

... المؤمنون و المؤمنات

"Men and women believers."

or says:

الرجال قوامون على النساء بما فضل الله بعضهم على بعض

"Men are the ones who should support women since God has given some persons advantages over others."

It does not say:

بما فضل الله الرجال على النساء

"Since God has given men advantages over women."

In fact here it means mutual rights not superiority. The interpretation of guardianship is presented and guardianship is not specified to men, rather woman is the one who safeguards values and fundamentals as well. However, God considers the characteristics of both woman and man and accordingly the duty of superiority.

In the words of the Chief of the Faithful, fear in its absolute sense is not considered, for instance, the action of Her Eminence Zahra to reclaim Fadak, is an example and the action not being for material gain indicates the courage of that lady.

His Holiness Ali (P) observing one, who has such an indifference towards the world, comes to the field in like manner, bears difficulties and never fears, never stated that the actions of Her Eminence Zahra (P) were incompatible with the fundamentals of Islam. For instance, at the time of usurpation of the caliphate, she, along with a group of women of Quraish entered the mosque to prove the legitimacy of the guardianship leadership of the Chief of the Faithful (P) and safeguard the principles as well. This shows why fear is reasonable on some occasions and is not desirable in any

conditions. It can only be practical for safeguarding and protecting the woman.

Is the woman obliged to completely obey her husband according to the words and way of life of His Holiness Ali (P)?

As referred to in the sacred verse:

.. وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا

‘Your Lord has decreed that you should worship nothing except Him, and [show] kindness to your parents.’ (17:23)

God considers kindness and humility towards parents equal to His servitude. Or when He states:

... وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا...

“Yet if either of them should strive to make you associate anything with Me which you have no knowledge about, do not obey them” (19:8)

... لَا تُطِعْهُمَا...

“do not obey them.”

Accordingly, similar to that is propounded on the obedience to the husband as well. It is obvious that we should observe standards and certainties to better understand the traditions in particular those, which seem ambiguous or difficult to understand. A tradition may have a message but we can perceive it well if we refer to the fundamentals and certainties as our basis. Where Her Eminence Zahra (P) states:

و لاخالفتك عاشرتني

"During this period I have never disagreed with you."

The word “disagreement” here refers to the matters of rights and obligations, therefore, the boundaries should be observed. Many objections to remarks of the Imams (P) are a result of a one-sided study that is a verse or tradition is studied separately and with no connection to other traditions or religious certainties.

Can you give an explanation on Imam's (P) prohibition on consultation with woman mentioned in Nahjul Balaghah?

The Imam's (P) prohibition has a particular reference. Nobody can find an instance in Imam's (P) maxims where consultation with woman in general has been prohibited. It is clear that we must consider the following different dimensions on understanding a tradition:

1. Text of tradition and understanding the content.
2. Authority and chain of transmissions of tradition
3. Basis and background of the traditions (Martyr Sadr focused on this component) ⁵

The first two components are usually in general sense, but the Imam's (P) taking of a stand is not general, therefore, it cannot be considered as a standing example. In fact, the prohibition on consultation with women has been issued as a command for the conduct of a woman who caused a crisis in the Islamic system in that era.

The basis of a tradition may be for a political, social or thought crisis. The reason that we cannot have a general consideration is the very practice of the Imam (P). If he believed these characteristics as the best for a woman in any condition, why did he keep silent towards Zeinab Al-Kubra (P)? Or why was there no reaction from him with regards to Her Eminence Zahra (P) and how she defended herself?

It has been quoted that the Holy Prophet (P) stated to His Holiness Ali (P): "My dear Ali, if you want to consult with my daughter Fatimah (P) after my departure, act upon what she would say, because Gabriel is the one who addresses her and she would say nothing from herself.

Another point, which must be considered in relation to the content of traditions, is the consensus of the people and cultural condition at the time when the traditions were quoted. The predominant culture in the Arabian peninsula with its aristocracy, woman denigration and many others, could not have been changed for a night or even 20 years, influencing views and opinions inevitably, some parts of the statements of Imam Ali (P) have been recorded with a mixture of concepts of that culture. In some instances, some parts of Imam's (P) words, the former, the latter or the part approved through the consensus of the people may have been recorded.

Hence, to have an independent judgment, it is not sufficient to rely only on the manifestation of tradition it is a must to consider the conditions of that time and the basis of the tradition. At times a tradition has been quoted at the time of taqiyyah (concealing one's beliefs at a time of eminent danger) and the command seemed rational expressing the view of the narrator.

The Imam's (P) way of treatment is not restricted to his words and deeds but also depends on his behavior, saying and taking of a stand. The manner of treatment of the Infallibles (P) towards their wives, daughters and sons depended upon their capabilities and personalities. The way of treatment of Imam Ali (P) towards Her Eminence Zahra (P) was different from that

towards his other wives the way of treatment is also another aspect that must be considered beside the content of saying.

According to the remarks of the Chief of the Faithful (P) what are the basic factors effective on the stability of marital life?

From His Holiness Ali's (P) point of view the factors effective on the stability and strengthening of the family are two, as follows:

1. The factors related to spouse selection
2. The factors related to the time after start of marital life.

It points out that events should be dealt with foresight. The wife and the husband must be equal and match to each other. The first condition for wife and the husband is being of an equal standing, that is, being spouses. It is not the random selections that can produce stability in our marital life. The wife and husband must consider if they have interests to share or not.

Psychologists believe that there are so many individual differences among people this may not be so in all cases if there is a general criteria. Being matched may mean two people on the same level. Being match to each other differs from person to person and depending on the occasion. Accordingly, the Holy Prophet (P) had special concern for Her Eminence Fatimah (P) more than his other daughters. He states regarding the marriage of Her Eminence Fatimah (P):

"I have no authority on her marriage".

Imam Sadiq (P) states:

"If Ali did not exist, a husband matching Her Eminence Fatimah (P) would never be found from the time of Adam until the Judgment Day".

Sharing the same belief and religion is one of the bases of matching however; unfortunately it is ignored at present.

The prudence of His Holiness Ali (P) on selection of Ummul Banin indicates that a great part of child's personality is transmitted through genetics (genes-chromosomes). It is clear that the chromosomes do not entirely transfer all characteristics. The ground for formation of characteristics is prepared during the stage of chemical processes and physiologic growth.

Whose personality characteristics are more important and focused from the Islamic point of view, that of the mother or that of the father?

There are some recommendations in the Traditions regarding the father's characteristics just like that of the mother. The characteristics of both mother and father are given importance in Islam. In general, marriage in Islam has a specific culture contrary to certain countries wherein discipline and ethics are not usually observed.

On occasions where you are concerned of the moral characteristics of woman or that of man, considering that in the Islamic family the structure of guardianship usually rests upon the man and the man heading the family will be more effective, precaution should be observed regarding the man. Imam Ali (P) states:

لان المرأة تاخذ من ادب زوجها و يقهرها علي دينه

"A woman is under the influence of her husband."⁶

و يقهرها علي دينه

Meaning that if one gives her daughter to a man who is not of the same religious level, the man can influence the wife in the long run. Of course, these are not in general and there are particular cases, too.

However, if the management of the house were upon the man he would be effective in influencing the moral and religious aspects. It has been observed through experience that when a woman of a noble family entered a family of a different line of thought, it is the woman who would be influenced.

Imam Sadiq (P) states:

العارفة لا توزع الا عند العارف.

"Al'arefah in gnosis means a woman of a specific awareness and insight who has high level from the mental and cultural perspective if such a woman marries a person incompatible to her she will encounter a problem. Altogether, these have been referred to in verse 26 of Chapter Nur (Light), in two words "impure" and "pure", covering all the mentioned points.

What are the factors of compatibility of woman and man from the Islamic point of view?

The late Tabarsi quoting from the Holy Prophet (P) in the book "Makarim al-Akhlaq" states: "The daughters and sons of Ali (P) and Ja'far are compatible with each other, for this reason Her Eminence Zeinab (P) got married with Abdullah ibn Ja'far while His Holiness could easily select a spouse for his daughter from among the rest of the people. However he has a special sensitivity towards Her Eminence Zahra (P).

The lesson is that the selection of a matching spouse must be considered in proportion to one's potentiality and capability. Who will be a matching spouse for the lady of the two worlds? Of course, it is the prince of the two worlds. Her Eminence Zahra (P) had other sisters brought up in the lap of the Prophethood however, for particular reasons, they could not attain a prominence such as hers. This is why the Holy Prophet (P) had no such sensitivity towards them. In the Traditions, the following variety of factors, as a basis of matching, have been mentioned:

1. Match in religion and faith
2. Match in personality and morals
3. Genetic and hereditary similarity

Islam recommends that one be discreet in selecting the spouse because characteristics will be manifested in the generations that will follow. For instance, His Holiness Ali (p) on selecting Ummul Banin consulted Aqeel who was a genealogist. Then the Imam chose the tribe having the reputation of bravery so that His Holiness Abbas be brought up with such characteristic.

However, when His Holiness Ali (P) sent Muhammad ibn Hanafiah to the battlefield he retreated. Imam Ali (P) helped him once more and he moved back again. His Holiness told him: O, my son you are my child, but in facing the enemy you are not like me, rather you lack ability to handle crisis and you are like your mother.

Accordingly, a person lacking courage will produce a child-like oneself considering the role of genetics and personality. Although some believe that

many of characteristics will be corrected through education and training, there will be little influence even with much effort (even if there are some potentialities that exist). Nonetheless, there must be basic potentialities so that there will be growth.

Accordingly, hereditary and genetic factors directly or indirectly influence compatibility. Regarding intelligence quotient it is recommended to select a spouse who possesses intelligence and keen perception as well. As mentioned in Traditions one shouldn't be careless in selection of a spouse and avoid selection of a person lacking normal perception and with low IQ for the sons.

The stupid persons (feminine) are of different types. First group with low IQ sometimes this might have normal intelligence, but deficient in analysis, problem-solving⁷ and lacking the faculty of decision. The second group includes those who cannot resolve a crisis, with their emotions dominating over their capability to perceive and make decision with hastiness and apprehension. These types do not deserve to be selected as spouses.

As we have mentioned before, the first factor which influences matching and compatibility is that of faith and religion. Faith and Islam have different meanings. According to an ideological study on the Traditions, faith and Islam are defined in two ways. Some consider faith as being a Shi'a and Islam as being a Muslim. Some believe faith is of the same level as Islam and some consider it higher than Islam. Islam means submission to divine commandments, while one who acquires faith, reaches firm and strong religious beliefs. In jurisprudence, the difference between faith and Islam reflects to being a Shi'a, however, according to Chapter Hujurat of the Holy Qur'an, faith is considered second aghebah (stage) and stronger than Islam.

The Holy Prophet (P) stated:

المومن كفواً للمومنة و المسلم كفواً للمسلمة

“A faithful man is a match for a faithful woman and a Muslim man is a match for a Muslim woman and they are of the same standing.”⁸

So there is a difference between faith and Islam. Undoubtedly, each Muslim of any level is not equal to another Muslim. For example, both the wife and husband are Muslims but only one of them is a believer. Religious standing is different. In case a person with high level of faith and who strictly observes obligations marries a person of lesser standing they will have problems in the future.

The late Tabarsi states in "Makarim al-Akhlaq:

عن يونس بن ظبيان قال، قال ابو عبدالله: أتدري اي شي تفسير فاطمه

"Do you know what our mother's name Fatimah means?"

قلت اخبرني يا سيدي

("Can you tell us the meaning?")

قال (ع): فطمتم من الشر

("Fatimah means removed from any evil and uncleanness".)

ثم قال (ع): لولا ان اميرالمومنين (ع) تزوجها لما كان لها كفواً الي يوم القيامة

“If the Chief of the Faithful were not to marry Her Eminence Zahra (P), there would be no spouse to match Fatimah (P) on Earth forever⁹.” Imam Sadiq (P) states:

المؤمنون بعضهم أكفاء بعض.

If a man enters into the circle of faith in its real meaning, he can be equal and match to a woman of the same standing. Focus on the same level of faith is because faith manifests itself in the personality and behavior of person and gives color and freshness to life.

قال (ع) : الكفو ان يكون عفيفاً عنده يسا

“Equal and match, is a chaste person who is not corrupted from the sexual and moral aspect, who is financially stable and can carry the responsibilities of life¹⁰.”

The word

يسار

means ability to manage and handle life. Now, this ability could be savings, a skill, an art or any other capability through which a person can earn a living. Some people believe equity and similarity in something apart from moral aspects, chastity and piety, focusing more on the economic issues, which to a certain extent, is considered by Islam. In fact, according to this Prophet's (P) tradition:

كاد الفقر ان يكون كفوياً

“Wretchedness can hinder human being from acquiring faith”

This is natural and many matters related to training have a special meaning in the scope of religion. Piety is of the most important characteristics considered in selection of a spouse¹¹. Undoubtedly, faith is different from piety. Faith is the first spark, but piety is the reflections of faith in limbs, in actions and deeds.

Someone asked Imam Sadiq (P) to give a reply to the question:

"In one sentence, can you tell me how we can find out if a person is pious? His Holiness (P) replied: "Piety means being present wherever God has enjoined one to be present and not being present wherever God has prohibited one to do so."

Therefore, the first boundary for piety is the observance of obligations and prohibited things. Taking counsel with Imam Hasan Mojtaba (P), a person asks: "To whom should I give my daughter in marriage?" The Imam (P) replies:

زوجها من رجل تقي

Endeavor that the suitor of your daughter be a pious person¹².

With piety is not just devotion but should be manifested in behavior such as observance of mutual rights in facing the spouse and other family members and dealing with and handling life. His Holiness (P) states:

فانه ان احبها اكرمها و ان ابغضها لم يظلم

“If a person is pious, there will be two states either he loves his spouse or not. If he does not love her he never does injustice to her and if he loves her he treats her well and respects her.”

Therefore, piety is a factor within us that controls and assists one not to go beyond limits

امساك بمعروف او تسريح باحسان

“Either he takes care of his spouse kindly or frees her legally and never oppresses her.”

Many problems that come up may make a person feel that he/she does not love his/her spouse and treats the spouse in the worst way. So, piety in the sight of Imam Hasan Mojtaba (P) is an effective factor for the establishment of justice in the family.

The Infallibles (P) have focused on education and training regarding selection of spouse. For instance, they have recommended avoiding idealism. Parents must avoid idealism in guiding their children in selecting the spouse and never be a perfectionist in terms of the qualifications of the spouse and conditions set. Imam Ali (P) asks: "Are you a perfect person that you seek a person with all qualifications? Conditions are relative and we must never be so sensitive, however, this does not mean being careless.

Once, Ali ibn Asbat, a companion of Imam Baqir (P) who was considered by the Imam (P) to possess a good character, wrote a letter to the Imam (P):

“I have a few unmarried daughters and I do not want to give them in marriage to the suitors who have already come. Of course, I did not set rigid conditions. I just wanted them to be as faithful as I am.”

The Imam (P) wrote in reply:

"I have read all what you had written about your daughters. As you said you considered your own faith as a criterion and up to now you have not found a qualified person. What you're doing is wrong, if you want to do so not only will your daughters be hurt but also the consequence of your sensitivity will be a factor that will lead to sinfulness and crime that could spread in the society.

If your example is the Holy Prophet (P) and his religion, he has never said so. In the Holy Prophet's (P) opinion whenever there is a person of good moral character and you are satisfied with his conduct you can give your daughter to marry him. If you do not do so, the entire world will be filled with corruption. If all people think that the spouses of their daughters must be like them, such an approach would block the way of the child for marriage, opening the ways and channels towards sinfulness and crime¹³.”

This is the viewpoint of Islam unfortunately people have insufficient knowledge in this respect. People must finally be aware of the fact that their deeds are far from the criteria presented by the Infallible Imams (P). People follow the way of life and marriage of the exemplary individuals and groups. If the exemplary groups change, which somehow are attracted to materialism, consequently, the behavior and view of people would change as well.

If the political, religious and cultural figures who are examples for people, but not in their practice, the entire world will be filled with the perversions and depravities and the responsibility lies on their shoulder. As the Holy Prophet (P) stated:

"One who propagates a wrong example in a society would be accountable for his own sin and towards all people who would be deviated in consequence of his misleading deed".

That's why people should be knowledgeable of Islam and Islamic teachings. Many individuals are thirsty for and curious of the truth of Islam. The first step in the field of cultural reforms is to present the truth and genuine Islam to the people. Islamic matters must be mentioned just like five-times-a-day prayer and we must enjoin people to do good and forbid them from wrong. His Holiness Ali (P) states:

"One of the rights of people upon the governor of a society is kindness and benevolence".

If the people be indifferent and show no reaction towards the signs of corruption in the society in a way that such corruption gradually becomes customary the mass media has the responsibility to safeguard religious and Islamic values and standards as well.

His Holiness Ali (P) had said:

"If the obligation of enjoining the good and forbidding wrong in a society were ignored, one would observe that unlawful deeds would little by little be considered as lawful".

The state of indifference is the greatest threat to the stability of morals and values, to the extent that values sometimes become anti-values. So the first step in safeguarding values is to enjoin people to do good and forbid them from wrong.

How important is consideration of family background in selecting a spouse?

According to the Traditions it is important, but is not of the first or second priority. If family modesty and chastity as well as training, cultural and moral factors were ignored on selecting a spouse, such a marriage would be similar to picking a sweet-smelling flower from mire. Imagine a person picking a flower from mire. When the person wants to pick that very flower, he has to step on the mire, gradually sinking into the swamp and be corrupted as well. The Holy Prophet (P) stated:

ايها الناس اياكم و خضراء الدمن

"O people, refrain from the beautiful flowers growing in a mire¹⁴."

He was asked: "What do you mean by beautiful flowers?" His Holiness (P) replied:

المراه الحسنى في منبت السوء

"It means, avoid women with beauty (of course, this beauty can refer to apparent beauty or good personality), but does not have a good family background (she is in a mire) because this will destroy the ground of upbringing and stability and will create trouble in the long run".

The Holy Prophet (P) was careful on the marriage of Her Eminence Zahra (P) because of the recommendations of Gabriel, the angel of revelation. However His Holiness (P) states:

انكحت زيد بن حارثة زينب بنت جحش

"I united Zeid ibn Haresah and Zeinab, daughter of Jahsh in marriage.

وانكحت المقداد ضباعه بنت الزبير

"...and the daughter of Zobair to Meghdad."

He continued: "I do so to demonstrate for the people what is in the customs and they would be aware that the best honor is that of Islam. "

ليعلموا ان اشرف الشرف الاسلام

Undoubtedly, equity has dimensions in terms of customs and religion. Regarding customs, social and economic authority, honor and common sense are the criteria. His Holiness states: "Individuals must be equal in the gem of Islam and faith because no social value could be equal to Islam and faith". The criteria of Islam and faith have special importance compared to other variations.

Another criterion is good disposition. Hosein Beshar asked Imam Abul-Hasan (P):

ان لي قرابه قد خطب الي و في خلقه سوء

A relative of mine wants my daughter's hand in marriage. Do I have to accept because of family relations considering the fact that to some extent he has a bad temper? The Imam states:

لا تزوجه ان كان سيئي الخلق

Do not accept if he has a bad temper. The important thing therefore is translating faith into action like having Islamic conduct and good morals. Having family relationship would not be a good reason in accepting such a person. Therefore, good morals and right conduct are from among the factors, which must be focused as well.

To what extent should matching be based on economic factors in marriage of two Muslims?

As I have earlier mentioned, wealth and financial ability is considered to the extent that the person could earn a living. However, carefulness in economic equity does not mean that there is no special tradition in this regard. There is such a tradition in the way of life of the Infallibles (P). For instance, Abubakr, Umar, Abdurrahman ibn Oof and His Holiness Ali (P) proposed to Her Eminence Zahra (P). Oof was an aristocrat and a wealthy person and expected the Holy Prophet (P) in spite of having an exemplary conduct to give his daughter to a rich one.

He thought of that because at the time the Holy Prophet (P) wanted to select a spouse for himself he selected Her Eminence Khadijah (P). It was so while she offered all her money as well as her life to the objectives of the Holy Prophet's (P) mission. Abdorrahman ibn Oof at the time of proposing to Her Eminence Zahra (P) suggested an amount of marriage portion to which no one could outrun. He added to the amount of marriage portion three or four times, camel, sheep, gold, silver and others, while it is quoted

in a tradition that Her Eminence Zahra (P) held a gravel stone in her hand and immediately it was turned into a piece of pearl and coral¹⁵.

The Holy Prophet (P) stated:

ان من يقدر علي هذا لا يهمله كثرة المهر

"One who has such a power does not care for the amount of marriage portion."

After this incident, Angel Gabriel came down to the Holy Prophet (P) and stated:

"God has selected Fatimah (P) for His Holiness Ali (P) in marriage and set the amount of 500 dirhams as marriage portion."

The very marriage portion, nowadays referred to as mahr us Sunnah (marriage portion), adjustable according to the times unfortunately, is at present, being disregarded. If the economic ability had been the main basis, the Holy Prophet (P) could have immediately given his daughter to Abdorrahman ibn Oof in marriage.

Is it important to consider nations, cultures and sub-cultures in the selection of a spouse from the Islamic point of view?

The Holy Prophet (P) used to encourage his own comrades from non-Arab nations and tribes to marry Arabs. They have remained without spouses, wanting to marry those from their own nation (non-Arabs). Most of the mothers of the pure Imams (P) did not belong to the high strata of society but possessed particular capabilities because of the fact that they were educated and trained in an era concurrent with that of Imams (P).

The mother of His Holiness Lord of the Time (may God hasten his reappearance) was a Christian however, she possessed the ideal qualities, being religious, faithful, pious and virtuous. Religion gives more depth to individual and social relations. Undoubtedly, if we believe in the fact that religion is a series of regulations for the conduct of a human being, anyhow it will have a bearing on the prosperity of the individual and society.

Does Islam focus on the sameness of age for a girl and a boy who wants to marry each other?

Yes, being about the same age is one of the factors considered for matching of wife and the husband. Of course, girls naturally reach adolescence 4 years sooner than boys. This difference between men and women is natural and physiologic accordingly, it is focused in Islam that the spouse should be either of the same age or the age gap between them should not be more than 4 years and since the tension and pressure on women are more than that on men during the struggle of life it is preferable that the age of woman be less than that of the husband.

Imam Ali (P) states:

و لتتكح المرأة لمتها من الرجال و لينكح الرجال منكم لمة من النساء قال(ع): لمة الرجال من

النساء مثله في السن

"A man should pick one from among women who matches him. Every woman on selecting a spouse should choose a man who matches her"¹⁶.

A person asked Imam (P): "What does "???" mean? He replied: "???" means nearness and sameness in age."

Undoubtedly, compatibility and nearness in age means being of the same age or having not much difference in age, because a huge difference in age may cause conflict to the extent that the two parties would not be able to stand each other.

Ignoring and being indifferent towards these factors will cause problems. Evaluating the variations, it is sometimes observed that some qualifications on which we focus or which the Divine Law recommends do not exist in the person. In general, focus on the factor of age is important. If there is a 15-year age gap between the two parties, the fact is that they live in two different worlds. In selecting a spouse, we must dispense with idealism, of course. Needs must be met in selecting a spouse. In selection of a spouse one should evaluate his/her qualifications. Is he/she the best one? Does he/she have such and such ideal qualifications so that one expects to find that very qualifications in the spouse?

To what extent can beauty be considered an appropriate criterion in selecting a spouse?

Beauty can be one of the criteria.

يا من ترضون خلقه و خلقه

A person went to see the Imam (P) and observed that His Holiness was beautifying his hair and face he then asked: "Why do you beautify yourself? His Holiness replied:

"A man who is careful in the beautification of his appearance will prevent his wife from corruption."

According to this tradition, beautification is not only enjoined for women but for men, too. Men should also care for their appearance. One shouldn't be an idealist and must consider similarity with one's own qualifications, focusing not only on appearance but faith, virtue and training factors as well. Unfortunately, some pay attention only to one dimension and are perfectionists and sensitive in selecting a spouse having high level in this qualification. A person cannot possess all the qualifications. Generally, idealism in any area leads to failure.

Imam Hasan Askari (P) states:

"Co-existence and social communications require carefulness, evaluations and assessments to some extent and going to extremes makes a personality abnormal."

In some instances, things can be found out through hearing and visiting but in some cases such as spouse selection, all that we expect are not visible but will be known only in the future. In fact, two thirds of characteristics are discovered through communication, sharp-sightedness, evaluation and carefulness and the remaining one third is concealed and not known. We are relative so our choice will be relative as well. Those who are very sensitive will put themselves in trouble and their choice will not be the best.

Can you tell us about the factors related to the strengthening and stability of marital life within the family?

The Chief of the Faithful was asked about his 9-year marital life with Her Eminence Fatimah (P). Ali (P) stated:

والله ما اغضبته و لا اكرهتها علي امرأ

"I call God to witness that I never made Fatimah (P) angry in any circumstances and never forced her to do something and there was no instance that Fatimah (P) made me angry and did not show disobedience in any matter."

ولا اغضبيني و لا عصت لي امرأ

"After any unhappiness, when I looked at Fatimah's (P) face, I was relieved of the sorrow and sadness

لقد كنت انظر اليها فيكشف عني الهموم و الاحزان»

Therefore, a husband must never make his wife angry. Most of family troubles are related to those things imposed on one another. His Holiness states:

"I neither forced Fatimah (P) to do something nor made her angry and she never disobeys me at all."

One of the factors contributing to stability of married life is the focus on appearance in a manner that when the spouses look at each other, their unhappiness and tension are removed and the difficulties and problems are forgot as well. A spouse who aims for harmony never encounters conflict and dispute.

The structure of spouse selection and control of family affairs and heading of the family in Islam make some men to assume that it is their right to control everything and that women must merely obey. What prevents such a misunderstanding as referred to in the statements of our Master Ali (P)?

The Chief of the Faithful (P) states:

من اساءها الي اهله لم يتصل به تأميل

"One who does evil to his family is not expected to do well with others¹⁷."

Accordingly, such a person does not deserve to have a responsibility in society and above all, to handle life. It is recommended that individuals be selected who will undertake social responsibilities that will not create crisis.

Husbands must support their wives because they have delicate sentiments and at the same time nurture optimism and tranquility in the family.

There is no mention of blind submission rather it is quoted that

لا تعصيا امرأ

that is - do not disobey the order.

Taking good care of the husband

حسن التبعل

Means there should be the state of submission and women must be emotionally supported and the faults in marital life must be ignored. Of course, there are two messages in training for stability of the family in Islam.

According to the first message, an individual functions entirely within the framework of obligations, in other words, one is aware of his/her obligations towards the spouse and performs the duties certainly, the

stability of such families is not what we speak about, in this case spouses function like customer and buyer.

According to the second message, the wife and husband stay with each other in any situation and this is the evidence of

جعل بينكم مودة ورحمة

that is- in some cases mere observance of matrimonial rights and obligations may not solve any problem and it is friendship and mercy which secure the stability of family.

Being aware of and doing one's part in duties and limitations of rights and responsibilities are considered among the factors, which contribute to the stability of the family. How do you evaluate this factor in the life of Her Eminence Zahra (P) and His Holiness Ali (P)?

On the third day of their marital life, Her Holiness Zahra (P) wanted the Holy Prophet (P) to determine the scope of rights and duties of each spouse and consulted him regarding the tasks, which each spouse must perform, inside the house. The Holy Prophet (P) replied: "The tasks inside the family should be upon Her Eminence Fatimah (P) and the affairs outside the home, upon the Chief of the Faithful (P). According to Imam Sadiq (P), Her Holiness Fatimah had expressed:

فلا يعلم ما داخلني من السرور الا الله باكفائي رسول الله تحمل رقاب الرجال

"Nobody knows except the Exalted God how I was filled with gladness at the moment, because of the fact that the Holy Prophet (P) through this division of duties freed me from undertaking the responsibilities leading to have interaction with men".

Family stability is connected to fulfillment of responsibilities, on one hand and to the self-sacrifice of family members, on the other. Duties means function within the determined framework however, self-sacrifice is something beyond it.

Regarding this division of duty, the best women are those who are not involved in conflicts and responsibilities, which are beyond the limits of chastity. Depending upon the circumstances, one may be obliged to do something outside the spheres of duties as well. Of course, His Holiness Ali (P) was helping Her Eminence Fatimah (P) in the household chores during his leisure time and Zahra (P) was doing tasks outside household duties when His Holiness Ali (P) was in holy wars.

Does such a division of duty means woman's deprivation from social rights and advancements outside the household?

Not at all, in fact, if a woman wants to be an ideal woman, she must not be involved in the tensions outside the family. Undoubtedly, in order to establish a general structure for the responsibilities of woman and man, it's better to rely not only upon traditions but in addition to the traditions, we can focus on the practice of the Infallibles (P), the atmosphere of the Islamic society and the function of those who lived near the time of divine legislation, too.

Martyred Professor Motahhari writes: "Mr. Baghdadi has compiled a book entitled

بلاغات النساء

(“Balaghatun- Nesa”) in 250 A.H. (during the era of Imam Hasan Askari [P]) which, unlike most books that include social issues on men, covers all sermons and speeches of the learned women of the Islamic world and all sermons delivered by Her Eminence Zahra (P) and Her Eminence Zeinab (P). This indicates that women who have attained such a level in the field of science and produced scientific works have never been limited to the four corners of the house.

Imam Hasan Askari (P) advised Hakimah, daughter of Imam Javad (P) to be a refuge for Shi'ite followers in their religious problems because after his martyrdom, his son, the Lord of the Time (May God hasten his reappearance) would be very young. A person hearing this became doubtful and said that consulting a woman on religious problems should be possible whenever there is no Imam. Imam Hasan Askari (P) stated:

"My son will be Imam even though he would be a child."

This means that people can refer to a learned woman for religious problems even if an Imam exists.

Imam Sajjad (P) assigned the responsibility of performing and executing the missions for which he himself was apparently responsible to the learned woman Zeinab (P) while she was enduring the worst crises. Indeed, the culture of Ashoora is a culture wherein women and men partake in the open and the fact is that when people asked Imam Hosein (P) why he took women to the battlefield knowing that he would not win the battle and he replied:

شاء ان يريهنَّ سبايا

“God had wanted them to be captives.”

This is why these captives are actually considered the complement of Ashoora and it did not matter whether they were women or men.

Fatimah (P), being shoulder to shoulder with His Holiness Ali (P), who had been the first devotee in the path of Wilayah (Guardianship), and Imamate or the movement of Zeinab (P) and that of Her Eminence Khadijah (P) all indicate social presence of women. In the pilgrimage supplications of Her Holiness Masoomah (P), one can read:

"Fatimah! You have a dignity and position in the sight of God different from that of others."

It is noteworthy that whenever an indefinite noun is used in Arabic language, it is referred to magnanimity which means, she had such a great personality that could never be expressed in words. Imam Sadiq (P) regarding Her Holiness Fatimah Masoomah (P) states:

"God has a sacred place that is the Inviolable Place of Worship. The Holy Prophet (P) has a sacred house that is the Prophet's (P) Mosque. The Chief of the Faithful has one that is Kufa. We, the people of the Household of the Prophet have a sacred place and that is Qom wherein the shrine of Her Holiness Masoomah (P) is located".

One can observe some similarities in the activities of this personality and that of Her Eminence Zahra (P), such as activity towards stability of the Imamate. Her Eminence Zahra (P) endeavored to prove the legitimacy of

guardianship of the Chief of the Faithful (P) not only because of being his spouse but also a follower of an Imam. Her martyrdom was a sign of stability of guardianship of His Holiness Ali (P).

Her Holiness Masoomah (P) was of the learned women of the family of Imam Kazem (P) who played great roles towards the continuity of guardianship. There is even a tradition called Favatem (Fatimahs), which talks about some Fatimahs and ends with Her Eminence Zahra (P) and the legitimacy of the leadership of His Holiness Ali (P). In the same way that the Holy Prophet (P) addressed her daughter Her Eminence Zahra (P):

فداها ابوها

"May her father be sacrificed for his daughter."

One can find in a tradition the status of Her Holiness Masoomah (P) in relation to the Imams (P) of her times. In this tradition, it has been narrated that once a group of Shi'ites wrote down their problems and questions and proceeded to Medina to visit Imam Musa (P), but His Holiness (P) and Imam Reza (P) were not at home. Her Holiness Masoomah (P) states: Come tomorrow to take the answers and show them to Imam Kazem (P) in order to be certain about the answers."

When they showed the answers to the Imam (P), he states:

فداها ابوها

"May her father be sacrificed for his daughter."

This was not only an expression of affection for Her Holiness Masoomah (P) but also shows her status in the scientific field.

Her Eminence Zahra held meetings for women of Quraish and Bani Hashem however, due to the political atmosphere at that time her sermons have not been available.

The sermon of Her Holiness Zahra (P) delivered at Medina Mosque defending Ali's (P) guardianship though, is available. Referring to monotheism, Divine Essence and Attributes and the philosophy of Divine Law, Her Eminence (P) compares the culture before the advent of Islam to that after it. In fact, acceptance of the division of duty is significant in social activities and scientific endeavors and it does not create obstacles on the path of her advancement. Or Her Holiness Zeinab (P) who ordered the people of Kufa to be silent before delivering a strong sermon so that Imam Sajjad (P) addressed her:

اسكتي يا عمه، انت الحمد لله، عالمه غير معلمه، و غير مفهمه

"O, my aunt please discontinue because you are in a critical condition. You, praise be to God, are a woman of science whose knowledge comes from no one and a learned woman whose knowledge is with God."

Of course, it may be said that a part of their knowledge is with God, but they also endeavored to obtain knowledge. Her Holiness Zeinab (P) made efforts in seeking religious knowledge. In fact, the rising of Karbala was a movement shared by man and woman.

The martyred Motahhari states: "There are both men and women narrators on the authenticity of traditions and chain of transmission of hadith (narrations) as well. Undoubtedly, if these traditionists had been staying at

home how could they have transmitted these teachings? Therefore, through observing boundaries and Islamic values and avoidance of intermingling of sexes, one can function as circumstances may allow and the treatment of the daughters and wives of the Infallibles (P), as demonstrated in their practice, indicates their responsibility towards scientific and cultural advancement.

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