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Fatimah Al-Zahra: The Spring Of Inspiration

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It covers her lineage; her miraculous and divinely inspired birth; her character; her exemplary life as daughter, wife, mother and teacher, and her crucial role to defend the religion of Islam after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), as well as events that led to her own tragic death. And finally, it takes a look at the tragic event of Karbala, where her son Imam Husayn ('a) was brutally slain defending the same principles as his mother and grandfather.

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Session 1: The Heavenly Descent

The other-worldly link of the creation of Fatimah al-Zahra, peace be upon her, and her arrival into the world.

To begin to understand Fatimah al-Zahra and why she is so important in Islam, we must start our journey through a brief introduction of her parents.

Her father is none other than Prophet Muhammad Ibn Abdullah. Born an orphan, with his father passing away shortly before his birth, he hailed from the respected Meccan tribe of the Quraysh and the clan of Banu Hashim. His lineage is traced back to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) through his son Prophet Ismail (Ishmael).

The Prophet's life was anything other than ordinary and it was at the age of 40 that he began to receive revelation from God which would form the Qur'an, thus initiating his open prophetic message as the final messenger of God and the seal of the prophets and a man who would change the course of history - not only for those of the Arabian Peninsula, but for the entire history of humanity until the end of time.

Her mother was Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid and she too came from the noble and respected tribe of the Quraysh.

Her father was an extremely successful businessman who passed on many of his talents to his daughter, Khadijah. At his passing away, he left much of his vast wealth to her through which she was able to grow her trade caravan business.

Due to her impeccable personality and character, she was known as the Princess of the Quraysh and was also given the title of The Pure One due to her honesty, integrity and the care and concern she showed for the less fortunate around her - especially the widows and orphans.

Their marriage, which according to historians took place when they were both around 25 years of age was no doubt a joyous moment in their lives and their families - although by this time, their parents had long passed on - however their extended family were present to witness this union with the staunch believer, Abu Talib presiding over the marriage ceremony.

It had been five years since the Prophet began his open mission of propagation of the Qur'an and the faith of al-Islam. In this period of time, he had already experienced many 'super-natural' happenings from God which clearly showed his status as the final prophet - including the unique event of the Mi'raj (ascension) to the celestial heavens.

It is in this context of having various Divine interventions in his life that the conception of his daughter takes shape and gives us an indication of her greatness.

One day, the arch-angel responsible for the descent of revelation from God, the angel Jibraa'il, appeared to the Prophet and said, "O Muhammad! God the Almighty sends you greetings and orders you to separate yourself from Khadijah for a period of forty days."

This was difficult for the Prophet as Khadijah was very dear to him. However, because God's order must always take precedence, the Prophet did as he was told - after all, there had to be some wisdom in this act of God.

Before parting ways, in order to let Sayyida Khadijah know the situation, the Prophet sent Ammar ibn Yasir to convey the following message to his wife, telling her, “O Khadijah! Do not presume that this separation from you for the next forty days is due to a lack of love for you. Rather, my Lord has commanded me to do this so that He may execute His decree. Do not imagine anything except fairness and felicity. God the Exalted praises you abundantly on a daily basis in the presence of His esteemed angels. Thus, when it turns dark at night, close your door and rest, and know that I am staying in the house of Fatimah Bint Asad.”

Sayyida Khadijah was deeply saddened by this separation, however fully submitted to the will of God. She had not let the Prophet down before and for sure, this was yet another grace being showered upon her husband.

During this 40 day spiritual retreat, the Prophet spent his time fasting and engaged in worship until the last days of separation drew near. As the 40th day ended, the angel Jibraa’il once again descended to the Prophet and said, “God sends His greetings to you and says that you must prepare yourself for the recompense and gift.”

The Prophet asked, “What is the gift from God?”

Jibraa’il, who was unaware of what this gift was, was received by the angel Mikaa’il who descended with a tray covered with a cloth of fine silk woven with heavenly gold brocade. He placed it front of the Prophet and Jibraa’il said, “God commands you to break your fast tonight with this meal.”

In seeking to better understand this historical event, the scholars have quoted the following story in which Imam Ali relates that, “The Prophet was staying at our house, and routinely at the time of breaking his fast, he would tell me to open the doors so that others could come and share in the evening meal. However that night, the Prophet commanded me to stand guard at the door of the house, not allowing anyone in and said, ‘O son of Abu Talib! It is prohibited upon everyone other than me to consume this heavenly food.’”

Imam Ali continues to explain what was happening on that night and then said, “I sat at the door and watched as the Prophet entered the house alone. He uncovered the tray and saw one bunch of dates and one of grapes. He ate until he was satiated and also drank the water which was there. Thereafter, he extended his hands to wash them. The angel Jibraa’il poured the water, angel Mikaa’il washed the hands and the angel Israa’fil wiped his hands dry. Then they ascended to the heavens with the leftover food.”

Witnessing this entire event transpire in his house, Imam Ali is then quoted as having said, “The Prophet stood up to perform the recommended prayers when the angel Jibraa’il reappeared and said, ‘The prayers are forbidden upon you right now! You should go to Khadijah immediately for God has promised Himself that tonight, He shall create a virtuous child.’”

Hearing this, Prophet Muhammad proceeded home to be with Lady Khadijah and later that night, their beloved daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra was conceived.

It may be difficult to fully understand the events leading up to her conception, and thus, all which we can say is that her creation was simply a sublime event and this was a scene set by God Himself which He directed and that He did not want there to be any ambiguity of her origin through His

initiation of the separation between the Prophet and his beloved wife, Khadijah.

Thus began the introduction of a heavenly light into the earthly realm - a woman who would go on to become the epitome of the fountain of paradise - al-kawthar - and would be the source of pride for the Prophet and his beloved wife, Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid.

Session 2: The Blessed Birth

The unique event of the delivery and the outstanding support from the greatest women of humanity in delivering Fatimah al-Zahra.

Just as the lead-up to the conception of Fatimah al-Zahra was unparalleled in human history, her birth was also as unique, and is yet another indication of her great status.

In a narration attributed to the 6th Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, he speaks about the birth of Fatimah al-Zahra and states that in the days following the marriage of Lady Khadijah to the Prophet, many of the Meccan women abandoned her - they felt she had made a mistake in marrying the “orphan of Abu Talib,” as he was sometimes known. After all, he was a man who had no wealth nor social standing - contrary to the affluence and elite status which Sayyida Khadijah enjoyed.

The 6th Imam goes on to say that with the women of Mecca dejecting her during her pregnancy, Khadijah had no one to speak with when her beloved husband was away, preaching and propagating the message. At this time, as a miracle from God, He gave the foetus in her womb - meaning Fatimah al-Zahra - the ability to speak and console her.

As the time of delivery began to draw near, the pains of labour started. Hoping that now they would change their minds, Khadijah sent a message to the women of the Quraysh, her previous friends, seeking their assistance in delivering her child.

However, when approached, unanimously, the women retorted saying that because she had ignored their suggestions not to marry Muhammad, they would not help her.

Not only was the Prophet sidelined, but in such difficult times, his wife was also being given the cold shoulder!

Khadijah became restless after hearing their reply, however just as she had never forsaken God, so too her Lord would not forget her.

At this instant, she saw four women enter her room. Looking at them, Khadijah was confused, and so one of them said, “O Khadijah, do not be grieved! We have come to your aide by the command of God. We are your sisters: I am Sarah [the wife of Prophet Ibrahim]; this is Asiyah, the daughter of Mazahim [the believing wife of the Pharaoh] who shall be your companion in Paradise; this is Maryam, the daughter of Imran [the mother of Prophet Isa]; and the fourth is Kulthum, the sister of Prophet Musa. God has sent us to assist you at the time of your delivery.”

One of them sat at the right side of Khadijah, the second on her left, the third facing her and the fourth behind her head to support her during delivery.

As Fatimah al-Zahra came into this world, God ordered ten damsels of paradise to descend - carrying trays and pitchers filled with water from the fountain of al-Kawthar.

The woman standing in front of Khadijah lifted the new born infant, Fatimah, and washed her with the heavenly water. Then, two white pieces of cloth, described as being whiter than milk and emitting a fragrance better than musk and amber, were brought and she was wrapped in one of them, while the second one was used as a scarf around her head.

They then asked Fatimah to speak and she did so by bearing witness to the oneness of God and the prophethood of her father, Muhammad.

The women then turned towards Khadijah and said, "Take hold of your child - a chaste, virtuous, prosperous and auspicious infant - one from whom a blessed progeny will emerge."

The birth of Fatimah al-Zahra heralds in, yet another significant spiritual milestone in the life of this great personality.

In this event, we see how God facilitated her delivery into the world by splitting the spiritual veils which separate this world from the intermediary realm of the barzakh.

With such a noble birth, is it any wonder that she is so revered in Islam and that millions look to her as a guide and inspiration?

Session 3: Supporter Of The Message

Fatimah al-Zahra, even as a young child, was constantly assisting her father, Prophet Muhammad, during the early days in Mecca and supporting him in any way she could.

It is no coincidence that the only child of Prophet Muhammad to survive past infancy was a girl, his daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra.

Given the era in which Islam came to the Arabian Peninsula and the level of ignorance (jahiliya) of the Arabs, Lady Fatimah not only served as a comfort and point of solace and strength for the Prophet, but she played a direct role in the socio-political-ethical revolution which her father was delivering to humanity.

In this Meccan period, the Prophet had to struggle for the hearts and minds of the Quraysh. He had to make them understand the futility of their worship of the false gods and their backward tribal customs - and this is where his daughter, Lady Fatimah, played a prominent role.

In a society which looked down upon daughters, such that the Qur'an is quoted as saying:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

“And when a daughter is announced to one of them his face becomes black and he is full of wrath” (16:58).

It is no wonder that God willed that the only child of the Prophet of Islam to survive would be his daughter as together, they could counter the negative stigma attached to girls in that society and for generations to come.

At a time when women were deprived of inheritance, and in fact were actually inherited by their male family members, Fatimah al-Zahra became the conduit through which humanity was taught that women had a right to inherit and bequeath and that they were considered equals in the eyes of the law - albeit by maintaining a balance in the Divinely-sent regulations.

When it comes to the real-world backing which Fatimah al-Zahra provided, she not only saw, but also lived the calamities her father experienced.

She felt the persecution and pains which her father endured - and perhaps even more than him as she was a young, helpless child.

She witnessed the actions of the people, including close family members as they insulted, mocked and physically attacked her beloved father.

It is mentioned in the books of history that the noted companion of the Prophet, Ibn Mas'ud has said, “One day when the Prophet was offering prayers in the precincts of the Ka'bah, Abu Jahl and a group of callous individuals of the Quraysh who were present, saw the Prophet. Abu Jahl said to his companions, ‘Which of you can bring the placenta of the camel belonging to so-and-so and put it on the shoulders of Muhammad when he prostrates in his prayers?’

One of them ran to bring the placenta along with blood and feces, and threw it on the Prophet's shoulders while he was prostrating. Seeing this, the harsh Meccans burst into laughter!”

Ibn Mas'ud noted that although he hesitated to remove the filth from the Prophet's shoulder who still kept on praying, however someone rushed to the young Fatimah and told her about what had happened to her father.

She promptly arrived with her maid, removed the filth from her father and proceeded to pray to God against the people who sought to embarrass and insult him. Although a young child of no more than a few years old, she felt it her duty to support her father in any way that she could.

The dedication of Fatimah al-Zahra was not limited to life in Mecca and so even after the migration to Medina, her unwavering commitment to the faith of Islam continued.

During the battle of al-Ahzab, also known as the Battle of the Trench, acting on the guidance of Salman al-Farsi, the Muslims dug a trench around the city to keep it safe from the polytheists.

One day, during this intense period of work which the Prophet himself took part in, Fatimah al-Zahra came to her father with a piece of bread.

The Prophet asked, "O Fatimah, what is this?"

She said, "It is from a loaf that I have baked for my son. I have brought this piece for you."

The Prophet, moved by this offering, replied to his daughter saying, "It is the first food to enter your father's mouth in three days."

Such acts may seem very insignificant, however given her age and abilities, show us that her conduct throughout the Prophetic mission was one in which she showed her eagerness to serve Islam in any way she could.

Such examples teach us that there is no such thing as a small act of goodness - every little thing counts when done for the sake of God.

Session 4: Migration To Medina

After thirteen years of life in Mecca, the early Muslim community, including Fatimah al-Zahra, move to Medina to start a new phase of life.

Thirteen long years has passed since Prophet Muhammad had begun to receive the revelation from God which formed the final teachings for humanity - the Noble Qur'an.

Doing all that he could to propagate the final message of God, the Prophet was constantly faced with verbal and physical attacks in his birthplace of Mecca.

The opponents did not only target him, but they continuously exerted pressure against his family and loyal companions.

The pinnacle of this subjugation resulted in the banishment of the small Muslim community to the valley of Abu Talib.

Forced to survive by eating the grass and herbs that grew in the mountains and whatever could be smuggled in from Mecca, it was during this tumultuous time that the Prophet lost two important pillars in his life.

During the month of Ramadan, three years before the migration, his first and most beloved wife and the mother of Fatimah al-Zahra, Umm al-Mu'minin Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid passed away - creating a huge void in the life of the Prophet.

This, coupled with the death of his uncle, avid supporter and one of the first Muslims, Abu Talib, created shock waves in the community.

The loss of these two dear individuals to the Prophet led him to announce that year as "The Year of Grief". Indeed, with the loss of these two staunch supporters and foundations of the early Muslim community, things were going to get much more difficult for the Muslims.

The physical and psychological pressures continued to mount on the fledgling community and so three years later, God ordered the Prophet and the Muslims to leave Mecca and journey north to the city of Yathrib.

Through employing careful planning, deep foresight, precautionary measures and of course above all, his complete trust (tawakkul) in God, the Prophet made plans to leave Mecca and journey to his new home of Yathrib, the city which would later be renamed in his honour, Madina al-Nabi - literally, The City of the Prophet.

However, the Prophet needed to retain someone trustworthy in Mecca - not only to return the trusts the people had given him - after all he was The Trustworthy (al-amin), but to also guide the remaining Muslims to Medina.

There was only one person who had the necessary credentials to carry out such an important task - his cousin, future son-in-law and his future successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib. Unbeknown to others, the disbelievers had planned to attack the Prophet that same night. The plan was simple - a member from each of the main tribes would surround his house and, in a group, simultaneously, would strike a blow to the Prophet - killing him. Working in tandem with one another meant that the death could not be pinned on one particular clan - and as the Muslims could not enact revenge on all of the pagan tribes, all of them would be absolved of the crime.

Knowing this plan was in place and that the enemies were waiting for the opportune moment to strike; the Prophet finalized the plans to leave Mecca and requested the young Ali to sleep in his bed. If he were to live through the attack, not only would he deliver the trusts back to their owners, but he would also lead the Muslims from Mecca to their new home. This ground-breaking act of self-sacrifice of Ali ibn Abi Talib resulted in God revealing a verse of the Qur'an about his dedication by saying:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

“And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of God; and God is affectionate to the servants.” (2:207).

That night, the Prophet began the journey, albeit by taking many precautions to trick those who were in search of him, safely making it to the Cave of Thawr where he waited until the right time to begin his journey to Yathrib.

Meanwhile, back in Mecca, the polytheists forced their way into the house of the Prophet and as they were about to level the fatal blow of swords, discovered Ali sleeping in his bed - they had been tricked! They left the house in hot pursuit of the Prophet, but he was gone - God had once again come to his aide.

Later, as instructed, Ali returned the trusts back to the owners and led the caravan including his own mother, Fatimah Bint Asad and the daughter of the Prophet, Fatimah al-Zahra, and a group of believers, to Medina.

Arriving to the outskirts of Medina around the middle of the third lunar month of Rabi al-Awwal, close to two weeks after placing his life on the line, Imam Ali found the Prophet waiting for him - and obviously waiting for his beloved daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra.

During the wait in Quba, the Prophet, with the help of those with him constructed the masjid of Quba and as Ali and the caravan from Mecca arrived, they began to proceed forward to Medina...

Leaving her birth place of Mecca, the center where Islam began, Lady Zahra would now prepare to enter the next phase of her life through the migration to Medina.

She would find this to be a place welcoming the Prophet, his family and the companions with open arms - affording them a golden opportunity to further develop Islam in an open and free environment.

It would also signal the next phase in the life of this young lady...

Session 5: Link Between Prophethood And Imamate

The next major milestone in the life of Lady Zahra is her marriage to Ali ibn Abi Talib - the establishment of the link between two Divinely sanctioned positions.

The migration to Medina opened a new chapter for the Muslim community.

Gone were the days of oppression by the insolent polytheists of the Quraysh. Behind them was the persecution they faced for 13 years in which their growth was stifled.

The fledgling Muslims were now free to practice their faith in the open and to begin the quest to win over the hearts and minds of the various regions of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

In the midst of all of this however, there was a young man who was looking to complete his faith and just like others around him, start a family - and that was none other than Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Having reached the age of 23 and enjoying an extremely close relationship with Prophet Muhammad, there were, without a doubt, many young women whom he could have proposed to. However, there was one whom he wanted to marry - a young lady at the same level to him in many ways - and that was Fatimah al-Zahra - the daughter of the Prophet. Although many men who were much older, affluent, powerful and with a higher status in the society had asked the Prophet for her hand in marriage, they were all turned down

- as God would be the one to approve of her marriage. Neither was the Prophet nor his daughter in search of wealth or perceived status in the society.

Her spouse had to be someone at the same spiritual level

- and other than the future Imam of the nation, who could fill those shoes?

Eventually after much reflection, Ali went to the Prophet. As modesty and shyness had overcome him, with his head cast down, he seemed to want to say something, however felt bashful. The Prophet encouraged him to speak and Ali mustered the courage and asked the Prophet for his daughter's hand in marriage.

The Prophet accepted the request however he said to Ali, "You should wait so that I may ask my daughter if she too will accept the proposal."

Historians note that when the Prophet informed Fatimah al-Zahra about the marriage proposal, she remained quiet, to which the Prophet said, "God is Great! Her silence confirms her consent for this marriage!"

This acceptance was the next step in moving forward in this blessed union.

The date of solemnizing the marriage was approaching and Ali realized that with his meagre possessions, it was going to be difficult to prepare the requisites to start married life.

After all, he owned very little and the only things of value he had were a sword and shield. As the sword was needed to defend Islam, he was advised by the Prophet to sell the shield to meet the expenses of marriage. He gladly sold it and brought the proceeds of sale to the Prophet in order for the requirements of the house to be bought.

After the purchases were made, from what remained, an amount was kept aside for the financial gift which Fatimah al-Zahra received. This gift, which

would go on to be known as mahr al-sunnah and was five hundred dirhams was a small amount for such a great woman. However, keeping in mind that the mahr is far from the “price” of the bride, this sentimental gift was merely a humble offering to a woman who was a priceless jewel.

On the night of the marriage, the actions which the Prophet displayed towards his daughter and her new husband give us a unique glimpse into his care and concern and is perhaps not seen even today in contemporary societies.

Holding the hand of his daughter, he placed it in the hand of Ali and informed her of the virtues of her husband. He then made a mention of the personality of his daughter to his son-in-law and reminded his daughter that had Ali not been born, there would be no one on earth to be her life partner.

The Prophet then divided the domestic affairs and duties of life between the two - he entrusted the household affairs to Fatimah and made Ali responsible for all of the outside duties. However still, Ali was known to help his wife with the house work and being there to support her when the need arose.

It is through this Divinely-approved marriage that a link was created between prophethood (nubuwwah) and mastership (wilayah).

This is a link which would solidify the spiritual and temporal guidance during and after the death of the Prophet until the coming of Imam al-Mahdi. - and beyond.

Session 6: The Ideal Woman

When it comes to exemplifying the best character traits of a daughter, wife, mother and teacher, Fatimah al-Zahra is the archetype for all Muslim women to follow.

The life of Fatimah al-Zahra gives us an insight into her character and personality, and by studying the multi-faceted role she played in Medina, women and men alike are given a glimpse into how they should mold their lives.

Thus, it is no wonder that the 12th Imam, al-Mahdi, has been quoted as saying that he finds a perfect role model for himself in the daughter of the Messenger of God!

Not only did Lady Fatimah live the role of a daughter, but after marriage, she displayed the qualities of the ideal wife and a short time later, the perfect mother for her four children -

Hasan, born on the 15th of Ramadan in 3 AH; Husayn born on the 3rd of Sha'ban in 4 AH; Zaynab born on the 5th of Jamadi al-Awwal in 5 AH and lastly, Umm Kulthum born in the year 6 AH.

As we see when we study her life, her motherly instincts guided her to not only take care of their physical well-being, but also their mental and spiritual betterment, and it is in her role as a mother that we see many lessons that we can learn from even today.

When it comes to nurturing children, there is no doubt that the father must be there to provide guidance and is something which Ali ibn Abi Talib carried out. However, it is the mother who plays an extremely important role in the training. Not only does she carry the child for 9 months, providing the foetus with various levels of care, but in many cases, she puts her career and life aspirations on pause to bring up her new born child.

Fatimah al-Zahra excelled in teaching her children through employing multiple methods - which we too can use in our family life.

In one beautiful incident, historians narrate that Lady Fatimah was busy in her nightly worship of God. Her young son Hasan entered the room and saw her in the niche, engaged in prayer. She was evoking God, making mention of the men and women of the community by name and praying for them one by one. Once finished, the young Hasan approached his mother and asked her why she prayed for everyone but not herself to which she replied, "One must think about others first and then their own family."

As we are told in the traditions, when we pray for others, such a supplication will be more readily accepted by God and in turn, the angels of God are ordered to supplicate for that person as they are more concerned about others over their own selves - and without doubt, their supplications will be accepted.

In a second example of how we can learn from this illustrious woman when it comes to imparting knowledge, Fatimah al-Zahra has shown how it is not only her knowledge, but rather, her method of teaching which are exemplary.

One day, a woman came to Lady Zahra with some religious queries concerning the daily prayers. The woman asked her question, received the answer and went on her way. However, for many days thereafter, she kept

coming to the daughter of the Prophet, asking more and more questions - and receiving her answers.

Eventually however, she confessed to Fatimah al-Zahra that she was embarrassed at inconveniencing her so much and would stop coming to her, asking her questions.

When al-Zahra heard this, she was taken aback and responded saying, “Ask me regarding anything which comes to your mind. Do you think that if a man had been hired to transport a heavy load to the top of a mountain for a payment of one thousand dinar that the job would bother him?”

The woman said: ‘No, of course not.’

Fatimah al-Zahra continued by saying: ‘My reward for answering every inquiry is more than that which fills the space between the ground and the Throne of God with pearls. Thus, I should be more inclined to answer your questions as I heard my father, the Prophet, say: ‘When the scholars of our followers are gathered on the Day of Resurrection, they will be bestowed with garments of honour equal in quantity to their knowledge and struggle to guide God’s worshippers up to the point that each one will be gifted with one million garments of light (noor).’”

Sayyida al-Zahra went on to quote her father, telling this woman, “Then the caller of our Exalted and Glorified Lord will say:

‘O you guardians of the orphans of Muhammad! You who inspire them when they are separated from their (spiritual) fathers and are their leaders! These are your pupils and the orphans whom you guarded and inspired, therefore grant them garments based on the knowledge which they gained from you in life. Thus, they will give each orphan that which corresponds to the amount of knowledge they received from the scholars up to the point that some orphans will be given one million garments. The orphans in turn will give to those who learnt from them.’

Then God, the Exalted will say: ‘Repeat upon these scholars, the guardians of the orphans, the bestowment - and double and complete it for them and for those who follow them!’”

Fatimah al-Zahra then added: ‘Worshipper of God! Surely a thread of those garments is better than that on which the sun rises in this world!’”

We see that Fatimah al-Zahra played multiple roles in her short life and that her method of educating others was unique and that she took into account whom she was guiding and used the appropriate means of teaching for them.

She used practical methods with everyone she interacted with - whether it was her own children or the women of the community.

Session 7: In Defense Of Imamate

Fatimah al-Zahra was a spiritually and intellectually strong woman who stood up in defiance to the intrigues of the time, endorsing the status of her husband and standing up for his rights.

It was the 28th of the month of Safar in the 11th year after the migration to Medina. The Prophet of Islam, the man who gave all that he could to guide not only his community, but the entire world, passed away.

Death is nothing new as previous prophets had also died and God has confirmed that His final messenger will also leave this world, “And Muhammad is no more than a messenger; the messengers have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed will you turn back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to God in the least and God will reward the grateful.

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ ۚ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ

“Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]? And he who turns back on his heels will never harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.” (3:144).

Disregarding the basic Muslim tenets of ensuring a prompt burial, the Prophet’s body lie in his house in Medina for many days with the family and close companions lamenting this loss. However, there was a segment of the Muslims were busy plotting who would take over the reigns of leadership of the community.

This group had gathered outside of Medina in an area known as the saqifah, a tent area, which belonged to the tribe of Bani Sa’ida.

Seeming to have forgotten the pledge they took on the 18th of Dhul Hijjah at the event of Ghadir al-Khumm- a short 70 days prior, a small contingent of people who had once been loyal to Prophet Muhammad discussed who has the right to take control of the Muslim community now that the Prophet had passed away. They insisted that this was the right of the Muslims to determine on their own and that there were no Qur’anic precedents nor Prophetic statements which vested the authority in any particular individual.

The days which followed the death of the final Messenger of God saw many tragic events unfold - affecting not only the family of the Prophet in the immediate, but also placing a wedge between his companions. These events would transform the destiny of Islam and the Muslims for generations to come...

Once the caliph was carefully selected, one of the first things which was done by the state apparatus was to work at eroding the status of the family of the Prophet.

Their first course of action was to confiscate the fertile land of Fadak - property which the Prophet received outside of a war and thus was his personal property which he in turn gifted to his daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra.

We should not think that the daughter of the Prophet was after land simply for the sake of ownership. Rather, if we dig deep into this event, we see that

her goal was to secure the rights of her husband - the right of leadership of the Muslim community which God had given him on the day of Ghadir.

She was merely using the right of ownership of Fadak and the witnesses which she had called in a calculated campaign to press the caliph and the Muslim community to think deeper about the words of the Messenger of God which he had delivered time and time again, most notably at the event of Ghadir. If they accepted her claim of the right to Fadak based on her own testimony and that of her witnesses, then she would be able to put forth the caliphate of her husband.

When the first caliph took office, he had also taken charge of all of the assets of the Muslim community - which he felt included the fertile land of Fadak. When Fatimah al-Zahra was told that her personal property had been taken away, she went to the caliph to prove her ownership. Bringing her witnesses to prove that this was indeed her property, he accepted the argument put forth and the land of Fadak was returned to her. However when the individual who would later on become the second caliph was informed of what had transpired, not only did he snatch the title-deed from her hand, tearing it to pieces, but he went on to quote the famous and grossly inaccurate statement attributed to the Prophet in which it is stated that he purportedly said, "We the group of prophets do not leave anything as inheritance, whatever we leave behind is charity."

In such a tense climate in Medina, Fatimah al-Zahra delivered her famous speech in the masjid of the Prophet in which she noted that her claim to ownership of Fadak was not only based on witnesses but also on verses of the Qur'an and a logical understanding of their contents.

As such, she is quoted as saying, "You assume that I do not have a share in the inheritance and that I should not inherit from my father and that there is no relation between us? Has God in His verses (of the Qur'an) not taken into consideration everyone in general and are not all Muslims included in these verses? Is my father discharged from the applicability of this verse? Or do you say that two people of the same community do not inherit from one another? Are my father and I not from one community?"

All of these actions took place in the direct sight of the Muslim community - with only a few of the loyal companions standing beside the Ahl al-Bayt.

Sadly, not only was the gift or inheritance which was given by the Prophet of Islam taken away from her, but she also saw the rights of her husband, the Commander of the Faithful Ali, taken away - namely his God-given leadership after the demise of the Prophet of God.

Thus, Sayyida Fatimah, as the unique and unparalleled woman that she was, used this golden opportunity of the transgression of her right of inheritance / possession to further advance the right of her husband, Imam Ali, to the caliphate of the Muslim community after the tragic demise of Prophet Muhammad.

However, this would fall on deaf-ears and the injustice and oppression against her and her husband would continue. Little did she know that this would be one of her final actions in this world, as her days were numbered.

Session 8: Beaten... Not Loved

The verbal, mental and physical attacks against the family of the Prophet continued - the next target which the opponents had their eyes on was none other than the beloved daughter of the Prophet - Fatimah al-Zahra.

The Qur'an clearly articulates that when Prophet Muhammad was asked by his community as to what they should pay him for his services of bringing them out of the depths of the pits of hell to the gardens of bliss, that he should ask them for only one thing.

However, before we provide the answer to what God told the Muslims they should give to the Prophet in return for his services, let us pause for a moment. If we really think about it, what could anyone offer the Prophet for his 23 years of selfless service?

What could the Muslims possibly gift a man who saved them and generations to come that would in any way repay Prophet Muhammad for his tireless efforts?

The response of the Prophet was succinct - all he sought - and that too by the order of God, was for the Muslims to love, respect and honour his immediate family members - the Ahl al-Bayt. Thus, God commanded the Prophet to say to the masses that, "Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near relatives.

ذَلِكَ الَّذِي يُبَشِّرُ اللَّهُ عِبَادَهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ۗ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا
الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ ۗ وَمَن يَقْتَرِفْ حَسَنَةً نَّزِدْ لَهُ فِيهَا حُسْنًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ

***"It is that of which Allah gives good tidings to His servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say, [O Muhammad], "I do not ask you for this message any payment [but] only good will through kinship." And whoever commits a good deed - We will increase for him good therein. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Appreciative."* (Qur'an, 42:23).**

However, when we glance through the history of Islam from the moment that the Prophet left this world, we see that this verse fell on deaf ears.

Historians narrate that after the death of the Prophet, his only child, Fatimah al-Zahra, did not step out of her house for seven days. On the eighth day, in a state of intense lamentation and grief, she went to visit the grave of her father, the final Prophet of God. Resting on the grave, due to the sorrow of the separation from her beloved father, she passed out.

The women of Medina ran towards her and sprinkled water on her face to bring her back to consciousness.

She then began to lament while addressing the Prophet saying, "My strength has parted away and my patience has left me, I have turned restless while my enemies rejoice. A heart-rendering sorrow has taken hold of me. O respected father! I have been left lonely, in perplexity and without an aide. My voice has become silent and my back is broken, my life has overturned and has become dark. After you, O father, I do not have any companion in these times of fright and there is no one to soothe me."

She then recited the following verses of poetry with a touching lamentation, "O dear father! Indeed every day, sorrow is a new sorrow, and by God, my heart has turned restless; each day, there is an increase in my

grief, and your separation has not been easy for me; O father, who remains for the widows and indigent, and who remains for the nation until the day of Resurrection? O father, we have been weakened after you; O father, we have awoken in such a state that the people have turned their faces away from us; which tears are there that do not flow upon your separation, what sorrow is there that does not continue after you; what eye is there that shuts (to sleep) after you, O father, upon you came a gracious revelation.”

The lack of love towards Fatimah al-Zahra continued - with the confiscation of Fadak being only the first in a series of acts against her and the Ahl al-Bayt which would eventually result in the miscarriage of her son, Mohsin, and her untimely death at the tender age of 18.

A woman who should have been given the utmost level of respect by the entire society, not only due to her blood relationship with the Prophet, but due to the status which God had granted her in the Qur'an and the countless statements of the Prophet of her unique status, was left bruised and battered - mentally, emotionally and physically... A religion which had empowered women, granted them rights which they did not have in the pre-Islamic area was now being disregarded as the masses went back to the pre-Islamic ways of judgement leaving the family of the Prophet and a group of the noble companions of the Prophet to fend for themselves.

A woman who should have been loved, cherished and honoured by the society was now being beaten down in every way possible...

Session 9: From One Door To The Next

Many people have had to pay the price for their faith - prophets, messengers and saints and the next one would be Fatimah al-Zahra - the only daughter of Prophet Muhammad - paying the ultimate price for the preservation of Islam, Propethood (Nubuwwah) and Divinely-Appointed Mastership (Wilayah).

After the death of her beloved father, the pains and agonies which Fatimah al-Zahra had experienced only continued to grow. Although she was in the privacy of her own home, even there she was not free from the verbal insults from some of the people in Medina.

It seems that to some, the passing of the Prophet was something insignificant - they grieved for a few hours but they lived by the ethos that, "life goes on."

Fatimah al-Zahra, was not only lamenting the death of her Prophet, but this was her father: her genesis; her origin; her everything.

He was the one who brought her up after the death of her mother, Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid.

He was the one who introduced her to her husband, the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali.

He was the one who rejoiced in playing with his beautiful grand-children: Hasan, Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum.

Above all, he was the one to comfort and soothe her when she needed solace.

She left the masjid of the Prophet and his grave and returned to her house, however she kept weeping day and night out of the separation from her father - a very natural human instinct.

Her lamentation did not subside, nor did the flow of tears end. In fact, her display of emotions reached to a point that one day, a group of elders of Medina came to Imam Ali and said, "Fatimah weeps day and night. We cannot sleep at night and we cannot find respite during the day. Please tell Fatimah to either weep at night and remain silent during the day, or weep during the day and remain silent at night."

Ali replied, "I will convey your message to her."

Ali came to his dear wife, Fatimah, and saw her deep in sorrow. When her sight fell upon her husband, she became calm and at so Ali said, "The elders of Medina have requested me to ask you to either weep at night or during the day."

Fatimah replied, "O Abu '1- Hasan! My life among these people is very short, and soon I will be departing. By God! I will constantly weep until I unite with my father the Prophet of God."

Imam Ali responded, "You are at liberty, you may do as you wish."

Imam Ali then built a house for his wife, Fatimah, at the cemetery of al-Baqi', far away from the houses of the people and named it bayt al-ahzan (the house of sorrows).

Every day, Fatimah would dispatch her young children, Hasan and Husayn, to go to al-Baqi' and she would then proceed towards the tiny house

of sorrows. There, she would sit and weep among the graves, and when night came, Imam Ali would come and take them all back home.

During the final days of her life, Fatimah's tears constantly flowed due to the pain of separation from her father and her heart yearned in his remembrance. She would say to her sons, Hasan and Husayn, "What happened to your father (meaning the Prophet) who cherished you so much? The one who sat you upon his back and was most affectionate towards you, where is he? What happened to your father who did not allow you to even place your feet upon the earth but rather, always lifted you up with affection?"

She remained grief-stricken, remembering the sweet voice of the Prophet as he used to recite the Qur'an which she would hear until late in the night.

Fatimah al-Zahra would come to her father's grave and recite poetry saying, "Such sorrows poured upon me that if they had descended upon the days, they would have turned the day into night."

Lady Zahra would also be heard saying, "When someone dies, his remembrance lessens day by day, but by God the remembrance of my father increases everyday; I remember that death has made a separation between us, I console myself upon Prophet Muhammad; then I say to myself that death is our path; and if one does not die today, then he will die tomorrow."

Historians relate from Umm Salama, the wife of Abu Rafi' that she said, "During the last days of the life of Fatimah, I was taking care of her. One day, her health was good and her illness lessened. Her husband Ali went out to finish some work and during this time, Fatimah told me, 'Bring me some water so that I may take a bath and purify myself.' I brought the water and helped Fatimah. She stood up and took a bath and changed her clothes. She then said to me, 'Spread my bed in the middle of the room.' Saying this, she lied down on the bed facing the qiblah and said to me, 'I will leave this world today, I have purified myself and no one should uncover my face.' Saying this she put her hand underneath her head and passed away."

When the women in the house realized that Fatimah al-Zahra passed away they told the young boys Hasan and Husayn who had also just entered to find their mother no longer alive, "Go to your father Ali and inform him about your mother's death."

Hasan and Husayn stepped out of their house calling, "O Muhammad! O Ahmad! Today your death has become more severe upon us as our mother has (just) died!"

They entered the masjid and found their father, Ali, and shared the tragic news about the demise of their mother. Hearing this news, Ali was so stunned that he fell down, unconscious. Water was sprinkled on his face and when he regained consciousness, he called out in a grievous voice saying, "How should I console myself, O daughter of Muhammad! I found comfort in you while you were alive, but now where will I find comfort?"

That evening, Ali prepared the body to be buried - only allowing the close family members and some women of Medina to be present.

After shrouding the body, Imam Ali called out, "O Umm Kulthum! O Zaynab! O Sakinah! O Fidhdhah! O Hasan and O Husayn! Come and behold your mother for the time of separation has approached."

It is quoted in the book, *Rawdhat al-Wa'izin*, that when darkness covered the city of Medina and the people were deep in sleep, Imam Ali along with Hasan, Husayn, Ammar ibn Yasir, Miqdad ibn Aswad, Aqil ibn Abi Talib, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Salman al-Farsi, Buraydah and a few other men brought out the coffin of Fatimah al-Zahra. They recited the final prayers upon her and buried her in the middle of the night. Imam Ali proceeded to build seven more graves around the real grave so that her actual place of burial would not be known to anyone.

The tragedies of Fatimah al-Zahra are many, however perhaps one of the most grievous is that despite being the only daughter of the Prophet of Islam and the Leader of the Women of the World, till this day, her grave remains unknown.

She is a woman who just as we read in her visitation (*ziyarah*), is one whose worth is shrouded in secrecy and whose grave is also concealed from her followers.

Session 10: Fatimiyyah Is Ashura

The importance of commemorating the death of Fatimah al-Zahra can never be understated. It is one of the foundational events in the history of Islam through which we can better understand the past, present and future.

Commemorating the event known as Ayaam-e Fatimiyya - literally the days of Fatimah is a time in which we remember the tragic martyrdom of the only daughter of Prophet Muhammad. It is not merely a 'traditional act' which is carried out but rather, a golden opportunity to learn more about this great personality and what we can learn from her short life.

In the current era, many communities mark two different dates for her martyrdom - 75 days and 95 days after the death of the Messenger of God - and this is done due to the difference in the historical narratives about when she left this world.

However, what is important is to ensure that this period of time is spent in not only remembering the tragedy of Fatimah al-Zahra, but also making the most of the sessions to learn more about her and her unique role in Islam.

The oldest living marja' at-taqlid, His Eminence, Ayatullah al-Uzma Shaykh Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, states the following in regards to these sessions of remembrance of the Lady of Light, "Amongst the fourteen infallibles, it was necessary for one of them to be a woman as if all of them were men, then all of the advice, recommendations and teachings which we see directed towards the women of the community - things such as how to take care of ones' spouse, how to maintain the home, how to take care of the children, the style and function of the hijab, how to modestly maneuver within society, patience and submission to God in the face of challenges and the hundreds of other teachings would have been mere words which were spoken and simple theological discussion to be studied."

Shaykh Safi notes, "It is possible that women of all ages would have said to themselves: 'If there was at least one infallible woman from amongst all of these people that God sent for guidance, a woman who knew what we as women go through, how we feel and how our emotions are formulated, then all of these pieces of advice we have been given and responsibilities which have been put on our shoulders would not have been there - as these men just don't understand us!'"

Ayatullah Safi Gulpaygani goes on to say, "The presence of Fatimah al-Zahra as one of the fourteen infallibles, and her being a role-model for women cemented the guidance and teachings which Islam brought and showed us that they are possible to implement in our daily lives."

He continues, "Amongst the members of the Ahl al-Bayt, Sayyida Zahra enjoys a distinct pivotal role and significance. When the Ahl al-Bayt are introduced, she is placed in the midst of them all, as we read in hadith al-kisa;

"They [those who are under the cloak during the revelation of 33:33] are Fatimah and her father and her husband and her sons." Indeed, amongst the Ahl al-Bayt, Sayyida Zahra has a pivotal role, status and greatness for which all of the Imams take pride in. Fatimah al-Zahra is the chief of all of the women of the entire universe; she is a part and parcel of the Messenger; and she is the wife of the [first] representative of God. She is such a significant

woman that she alone, from amongst the women- folk, was chosen to take part in the event of mubahilah, based upon the order of the Qur'an..."

His eminence goes on to say, "In every aspect - other than in the status of prophethood - she is a carbon copy of her father: in terms of her mannerisms (akhlaaq), knowledge (ilm) and perfection (kamaalaat). Just as the Imams, in her life, actions and speech, the way she practiced her religion and followed the religious precepts, she is a guide towards the religious injunctions of the Divine."

Ayatullah Safi states, "One of the miracles of Sayyida Fatimah is her extemporaneously delivered sermon - the sermon of Fadak. During that atmosphere of spiritual-asphyxiation in Medina and the major coup d'état which had taken place shortly after the tragic demise of the Messenger of God and all of the other heartrending events which had transpired, this woman delivered a sermon which is at the pinnacles of eloquence and oratory prowess..."

Shaykh Safi notes, "Honouring Fatimiyyah and the stances of Lady Fatimah, the life history of Lady Fatimah, the asceticism of Lady Fatimah, the worship of Lady Fatimah and the knowledge and wisdom of Lady Fatimah must always be a part of our religious regiment. Today, we are all in need of taking Sayyida Zahra as our role model. The Muslim society needs to look towards her and follow her example in how she conducted her married life and how she brought up her children - as indeed she had the best approach and technique in these regards."

He writes, "Today, the words of this great woman must become life-lessons in the lives of everyone women and men alike. Fatimiyyah is an era; Fatimiyyah means to oppose the leaders of oppression; Fatimiyyah means to struggle in order for truth to be victorious over falsehood; Fatimiyyah means the global and Divinely appointed governance of Imam al-Mahdi, may God hasten his noble advent!"

He concludes his guidance by saying, "All of us must be appreciative of the institution of the enlightening Majaalis-e-Fatimi and take full use of the blessings contained therein. Perhaps one of the most important responsibilities which we have in this regard is to make supplication, with complete humility and penitence, to God the Most High, for the hastening of the advent of the dear child of Fatimah, namely Imam al-Mahdi, may God hasten his noble advent."

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