

Fatima Zahra (A.S.): Jewel in the Crown of Womanhood

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

Dignified Status of Woman

Islamic law bestows upon woman the right of inheritance and the right of possessing and disposing of her property, when other communities of the world deprived her of her basic human rights. Islam placed the eternal reward of Paradise under the feet of woman, in her capacity as mother. The Prophet emphasised in his sermon on the mount Arafat, during his last pilgrimage to Makkah, as well as, in his last will on the death bed, that woman must be treated with kindness. Islam also gave equal rights to men and women to acquire knowledge. The Messenger of Allah said : "Acquisition of knowledge is an obligation on every believing man and every believing woman." The key to any development is knowledge. By giving woman a complete right to progress in the field of knowledge, Islam considers woman an indispensable partner of man for building a healthy and constructive society.

One of the outstanding achievements of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (saww) was to uplift the status, honour and dignity of woman, who was meted out a brutal and inhuman treatment in the pre-Islamic era. Islam prepared woman to fulfil her social duties and become a dignified daughter, a respectable wife and a loving mother. At each phase of her life, Islam elevated progressively, the respect to be given to womanhood. She was not to be considered a mere chattel. She was not to be exploited for economic and commercial ends. She had a role to play, not only in protecting her household, but also in protecting the society as a whole. Islam placed on her shoulder a co-responsibility of safeguarding the purity and sanctity of family environment, and that of generations to come. The fabric of the society is shaken when woman leads the way towards social decadence. Families are disintegrated and children are left to wander in wilderness, when woman fails in her obligations.

Greatest Woman of Islam

Islam presented a model character of womanhood in the great personalities of Lady Khadijah, the Mother of the Believers, and her daughter Fatima, the truthful. The former sacrificed the power and glory of abundant wealth for the sake of Islam, and adopted a life of poverty. The latter followed the footsteps of her mother and left an immortal legacy of human greatness, expressed in her attributes of purity, sincerity, unshakeable faith and contentment with the pleasure of Allah, in happiness and afflictions.

Lady Fatima was born on 20th Jamadi-ul-Thani, five years after the declaration of

Prophethood. Ibn 'Abdul Birr quotes 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet as saying, "I have seen no one whose words and speech were as similar to that of the Prophet as Fatima's." (Al-Isti'ab). The overwhelming love and respect which existed between the Prophet and his daughter, were based at the apex of human compassion. When 'Aisha was asked : "Who was the most beloved to the Prophet among men?" She replied : "Ali". When she was asked : "Who was the most beloved to him among women?" She replied : "Fatima". The Prophet normally welcomed his daughter by rising, taking her hand, kissing her and seating her in his place. She was the last person the Prophet used to see when leaving Madina; and was the first person the Prophet used to visit on returning back to Madina.

When Ali proposed to marry Fatima, the Prophet gladly accepted after consulting her. The Prophet said that had it not been for Ali, Fatima would not have had a suitable match. It was only through the family of Ali and Fatima that the Almighty gave an ever present existence to the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (saww). The result of this wedlock was revealed across centuries when, the world of Islam witnessed constructive contribution made by the lineage of Ali and Fatima, in the field of science, exegesis of the Quran, ahadith (traditions) of the Prophet, Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), adab (literature) and other branches of knowledge. They broke the record of bravery in Jihad - the struggle for the sake of Allah and His religion.

The Most Blessed Wedding on Earth

The words uttered by the Prophet on the occasion of the marriage of Amirul Moamineen Ali and Lady Fatima in the Mosque, in the assembly of Sahaba (the companions), reflected his insight and wishes, which were translated into actions and achievements that followed. The Prophet prayed in his sermon: "O Allah! Bless both of them, sanctify their progeny and grant them the keys of Your Beneficence, Your treasures of wisdom... and let both of them be a source of blessing and peace to my ummah (community)." It was a perfect harmony and greatness in the character of Imam Ali and Lady Fatima, which never allowed them to lose patience and perseverance. They were indeed, a great blessing to the ummah as the Prophet had foreseen. Numerous narrations related from the Prophet and recorded in the ancient books of ahadith, describe their proximity with the Prophet in his mission. Imam Ali and Lady Fatima and the children from their lineage are at the apex of the taharah (purity) of the Prophet's household. The verse of purification revealed in the holy Quran is a living testimony to this fact. Their foremost and pioneering spirit of sacrifice for Islam, could never be obliterated from the hearts and memory of generations of mankind. Their prayers and sacrifice, their living and dying was for Allah, the Lord of the Universe. Their faith and devotion was for their Creator and for His cause, which they served selflessly.

No household was as successful as that of Imam Ali and Lady Fatima because it was built on the foundation laid down by the Prophet and Lady Khadijah, whose greatness surpasses human perception. The graduates of this purified family were given honours, hitherto unheard of. The Prophet named his daughter Fatima : "Leader of the women of the worlds." He described her husband Ali, the valiant, as : "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate." He called her two sons Hassan and Hussain : "the Leaders of the youths of Paradise." No family unit, since the creation began, has ever produced so many qualities, the radiance of which .glitters the soul and spirit of the obedient devotees of the Almighty

The Knowledge and Wisdom of the Leader of the Ladies of Paradise

The outstanding wisdom of the members of the household of the Prophet is expressed through their deeds and words, which were always coherent with each other. They were the role models of all the ethical behaviour which they taught. They preached what they practised in public and private life. The purity of their faith in Allah was manifest in their love, devotion and obedience to Allah.

Fatima, the truthful lady of the house of the Prophet, derived her knowledge and wisdom directly from the Prophet, who derived his through the Revelation. Lady Fatima (a.s.) watched closely all the actions of her father, who was commissioned by the Almighty to guide humanity towards the Right Path. She was brought up by the Prophet and taught how to be a perfect example for womanhood, as he was for man. The Prophet said, "Fatima is my part. Whoever pleases her, pleases me, and whoever displeases her, displeases me." There are many ahadith (traditions) of the Prophet narrated in the authentic books of Muslims, which emphasise clearly the special position enjoyed by her in the Islamic upbringing (tarbiyah) of the Muslim community (ummah). Indeed, Lady Fatima was an integral part of the mission of Prophet .Muhammad (saww) and she remained totally committed to that status as long as she lived

Lady Fatima describes Iman (Faith) and the Articles of Faith

Faith in the Creator is essential for submission to His Will. Polytheism pollutes the soul, in as much as, disbelief in the Oneness and Uniqueness of God, results in agnosticism. This fact is best reflected in the wise tradition of Lady Fatima. She says, "Allah ordained Faith for you as a purity from polytheism." However, Faith must have its outer expression in the form of worship. The mode of prayers (Salaat) prescribed by Islam is such that a worshipper remains ever conscious of the presence of God. Human weakness and its susceptibility to commit sins has to be constantly reminded of the favours of God.

Salaat (Prayers)

All our endeavours are incomplete without being thankful for the benevolence of the Sustainer. Hence, Lady Fatima says, "And Allah ordained Salaat (prayers) as the cause of your purification from pride." In the daily prayers performed in congregation, the white and the black, the rich and the poor, the rulers and their subjects, the master and the slave, become equal in the sight of God and stand shoulder to shoulder, without any discrimination.

Zakaat (Alms)

If the sense of thankfulness is not extended to human beings, with whom we have to co-exist, then thanks-giving to God is not complete. We are interdependent on each other. Islam neither believes nor preaches any existence in isolation. Human favours must be repaid with favours, according to the Quran. Therefore, helping fellow humans who are in need, is also an obligatory duty in Islam. Says Lady Fatima, "And Allah made alms (obligatory), for the purity of your soul and as a means of increasing your sustenance." This shows that Zakaat (poor due) is not considered a loss, but an investment which will be repaid with manifold favours and .bounties of Allah

Saum (Fasting)

In order to formulate a habit of extending a helping hand to the needy and poor members of human society, one has to feel their hardships. Islam trains the believers for any eventuality. Poverty and richness can easily change sides, as the history of human existence on earth teaches us. Lady Fatima throws light on this aspect of Islamic teachings in her tradition. She says, "And Allah made (obligatory), fasting (saum) for the firmness of sincerity." Indeed, sincerity towards the creatures of God is an expression of sincerity towards the Creator. Those who do not value human life, are not sincere to God. Those who cannot feel and meet the hardship of poor, have some defects in their humanity. The believers are given a practical spiritual training through all forms of worship. For example, fasting keeps them aware of the throngs of hunger and thirst suffered by the majority of human beings as a daily routine in their life.

Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Muslims also have to have a first hand knowledge of the condition of the fellow members of the community. Islam goes as far as providing an opportunity, where the believers can meet each other in the largest gathering ever on the face of the earth. Once in a life-time, the believers who can afford, have a duty to go for pilgrimage to Makkah. Lady Fatima says, "And Allah made (obligatory), Hajj (pilgrimage), for the reinforcement of the religion." This proves that religion is expressly concerned with serving the cause of God, one of the most vital aspect of which is, to be in communion with the masses.

The obvious shortcoming of the modern society is the absence of fairness in most of the human dealings. This creates hard feelings in the hearts of the ones who are deprived of justice. All the class struggles, crimes, wars and other violent outbursts are due to lack of justice. Lady Fatima emphasises the importance of justice in her tradition. There are many people who are hurt by the society's failure in dispensing justice. She says, "And Allah made (obligatory), abiding by justice, a means for harmonisation of the hearts

Amr bin Ma'aruf' and 'Nahi anil Munkar' (Enjoining good and forbidding evil)'

Peace can be established in a society through interaction of certain contributory factors. Islam trains members of its community to meet the objective of peaceful co-existence with others by promoting righteousness and opposing evil. Only in this way justice can prevail. Without justice, there can never be peace; and dispensation of justice can only be achieved through authoritative guidance.

Lady Fatima says, "And Allah made (obligatory), enjoining good (amr bil ma'aruf) and forbidding evil (nahi 'anil munkar), for the improvement of the society." Every member of the society who cares for its betterment, has to honour this duty. Life is like a journey which moves towards a set destiny. All the travellers on a plane, normally have one common objective, that of reaching their destination safely. But if anyone of the co-travellers tries to open the emergency door of the aircraft in mid-air, he has to be restrained by other passengers. No sensible person would justify the action of a crazy traveller in the name of 'freedom of choice'. In other words, no excuse can be acceptable under the slogan of 'freedom of action' when life of other people is in danger. At this point in time, the effort of all the passengers would be concentrated on enjoining good and forbidding evil. If persuasion fails, then they would have to use force in the interest of all concerned.

Jihad (Holy Struggle)

This leads us to yet another important duty bestowed on responsible communities - that of struggling towards the Right Path or the Path of God, which features an inherent goodness and purity. Lady Fatima (a.s.) draws our attention by saying, "And Allah made (obligatory), Jihad (struggling for the sake of God) the glory for Islam and humiliation for the infidels and the hypocrites." But how can one struggle with himself (or herself) and with the outside world? There is one essential ingredient which can lead to success. Jihad has to be supported by patience, so that one does not lose sight of the aim of the struggle, which one undergoes persistently in life

Sabr (Patience)

A person is constantly struggling with his own desires and with the challenges of the outside world. He may have to adopt different mode of fighting the evil tendencies of his inner self and of his surroundings. In both the processes, impatience can thwart his efforts. Therefore, Lady Fatima advises us, "And Allah made (obligatory), the patience (sabr) as an aid for getting eternal reward." God is the bestower of eternal rewards, which will be extended beyond life, when all our actions would have come to an end. The virtues of this life, for the benefit of .mankind, would materialise in the form of bounties of God

Birr-al-Waledain (Righteous conduct towards parents)

First and foremost in the categories of virtuous living and maintaining human rights, are the rights of parents that must be respected. Says Lady Fatima, "And Allah made (obligatory), the righteous behaviour (or kindness) towards parents (birr al waledain) as a protection from His wrath."

Silat-ul-Arhaam (connections with kinship)

Second in the category of human rights are the rights of blood relatives (Silat-ul-arhaam). Lady Fatima continues, "And Allah made (obligatory), connections with kinship the cause of lengthening of life." One of the strong bond of protection is good relation of a person with his relatives. They are his partners in joy and sorrow. They are the first source to whom he turns in need and in hardship. They provide solace in grief. They are his backbone when he is treated unjustly by others. Therefore, Islam places great importance on the bond of kinship.

Wafa bin-Nadhr (fulfilment of vow)

This is how Islam lays the foundation of the social structure of society. In any society, there are bound to occur deviations and inequities. But there are ways and means to enforce corrective measures. For example, a person may take a vow or make a promise to himself that he would carry out certain good deeds. He is expected to fulfil his vow, simply because God is aware of his intention and is the main witness of his vow. Lady Fatima says in this respect, "And Allah made (obligatory), the execution of vow (wafa bin-nadhr) as a medium of forgiveness." This means that Allah has kept His door of Mercy open and is willing to forgive His repentant servants, who fulfil their vows. Despite such lofty morals, Islam comes under attack from many obstinate people with half knowledge, although they are aware that Islam .has solutions to many challenges of the modern world

Qisaas (Punishment for homicide)

Deviation in society is reflected in an increasing rate of violent crimes. Murderers get away

with sentences far less in proportion to the severity of grievances caused to the bereaved families. Islamic penal law is based on capital punishment as a deterrent to crime. In this way, the rights of all citizens to live in peace can be respected. Lady Fatima has explained this aspect in her tradition. She Says, "And Allah made (obligatory), law of qisaas (retaliation for .homicide against the guilty) as the security from spilling (innocent) blood

Tawfiyat al-Makaeel wal Mawazeen (correct use of weights and measures)

As people interact with each other in economic activities, Islam emphasises fair dealings in trade. Dishonesty in trade can generate enmity. Lady Fatima, whilst explaining the Islamic principle of just dealings, says, "And Allah made (obligatory), the correct use of weights and measures as a deterrent from fraud." Modern societies have introduced many legal requirements to protect the interest of consumers, as regards the description of goods and .usage of correct weights and measures

Tark as-Sirqah (refraining from theft)

Thefts committed through misrepresenting the description of goods and services, generate counter reaction at consumer level. Lady Fatima covers this point by saying, "And Allah made (obligatory), refraining from theft for the sake of decency." Decent behaviour in the process of exchange of goods and services, can spare buyers and sellers from unfair transactions.

An-Nahi 'an Shurbil Khamr (prohibition from drinking alcohol)

In recent years, scientific discovery that, smoking imminently damages health, has been given a wide publicity. If a fraction of similar publicity had been given to the negative and destructive effects of drinking alcohol, then society would have been saved from many disasters. The adverse effects of consumption of alcohol are too obvious to be concealed. At personal and social level, this habit is showing its landmark in the increasing number of accidents, crimes, assaults and wastage of resources. Says Lady Fatima, "And Allah made prohibition from drinking intoxicants, the cause of refraining from evils."

Ijtinab al-Qadhf (prohibition from accusing others of adultery)

Islam has prohibited certain acts as a shield from going astray. Society consists of individuals, and individuals comprise communities and families. If family unit is saved from the damaging effects of permissiveness, then the foundation of community becomes strong. If the community is on the right track, then it enjoys respect in the society. This is why Islam seeks to protect the chastity of family above everything else. However, where the fabric of society is threatened due to sinful acts, rigorous procedure is followed under Islamic law before verdict is passed. A person cannot indulge himself in loose gossip of accusing others

of adultery. If he cannot produce witnesses, he himself becomes liable to punishment. This is one of the cases, where damage is easy to inflict but difficult to mend. This explains strict punishment against the violators. This fact is reflected in the tradition of Lady Fatima who says, "And Allah made (obligatory), the prohibition from accusing (others) of adultery, as a protection for avoiding the curse (of Allah)."

Tahrem as-Shirk (prohibition of polytheism)

If the triangle of family, community and society is to remain healthy, then at each level there has to be a conscious recognition of the purpose behind human existence. God did not create mankind in vain. In Islam, Tawheed (Oneness and Uniqueness of God) is at the core of religious faith. Polytheism is considered an unforgivable sin. Lady Fatima emphasises this fact and says, "And Allah prohibited polytheism for the sake of sincerity in (abiding by) His worship."

Taa'at Ahl ul Bait (obedience of the holy progeny of the Messenger of Allah)

The path that leads us to God is pure and sublime, without any crookedness. In the human society, certain selected persons have been chosen to lead the human caravan towards salvation. Due to their own exalted character and devoted spirit, they are best placed to guide humanity towards justice and peaceful living. They are the ones through whom Allah departs his guidance because they are the keepers of His Trust. They are the heirs of the Final Message of Allah. Lady Fatima is explicit on this matter. She says, "And Allah made (obligatory), the obedience of us (the holy household of the Prophet) for safeguarding the society's system of organisation, and our Imamate (leadership), as a security from disunity."

In the short period that Fatima Az-Zahra (Fatima the radiant) lived after her father, and until the time she died at the age of 18, she devoted her life to fight for justice. She was absolutely sure that Muslim community can only be saved from misguidance by following the leadership of the House of the Prophet, in accordance to his will. But the majority of Muslims opted to follow whoever came to power. What was the result? The innumerable divisions among Muslims speak for themselves. Muslims have agreed not to agree with each other despite the .fact that the Quran invites them towards tolerance, respect, unity, and brotherhood