

Fatimah bint Muhammad

Fatimah was the fifth child of Muhammad and Khadijah. She was born at a time when her noble father had begun to spend long periods in the solitude of mountains around Makkah, meditating and reflecting on the great mysteries of creation.

This was the time, before the Bithah, when her eldest sister Zaynab was married to her cousin, al-Aas ibn ar Rabi'ah. Then followed the marriage of her two other sisters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum, to the sons of Abu Lahab, a paternal uncle of the Prophet. Both Abu Lahab and his wife Umm Jamil turned out to be flaming enemies of the Prophet from the very beginning of his public mission.

The little Fatimah thus saw her sisters leave home one after the other to live with their husbands. She was too young to understand the meaning of marriage and the reasons why her sisters had to leave home. She loved them dearly and was sad and lonely when they left. It is said that a certain silence and painful sadness came over her then.

Of course, even after the marriage of her sisters, she was not alone in the house of her parents. Barakah, the maid-servant of Aminah, the Prophet's mother, who had been with the Prophet since his birth, Zayd ibn Harithah, and Ali, the young son of Abu Talib were all part of Muhammad's household at this time. And of course there was her loving mother, the lady Khadijah.

In her mother and in Barakah, Fatimah found a great deal of solace and comfort. In Ali, who was about two years older than she, she found a "brother" and a friend who somehow took the place of her own brother al-Qasim who had died in his infancy. Her other brother Abdullah, known as the Good and the Pure, who was born after her, also died in his infancy. However in none of the people in her father's household did Fatimah find the carefree joy and happiness which she enjoyed with her sisters. She was an unusually sensitive child for her age.

When she was five, she heard that her father had become Rasul Allah, the Messenger of God. His first task was to convey the good news of Islam to his family and close relations. They were to worship God Almighty alone. Her mother, who was a tower of strength and support, explained to Fatimah what her father had to do. From this time on, she became more closely attached to him and felt a deep and abiding love for him. Often she would be at his side walking through the narrow streets and alleys of Makkah, visiting the Kabah or attending secret gatherings of the early Muslims who had accepted Islam and pledged allegiance to the Prophet.

One day, when she was not yet ten, she accompanied her father to the Masjid al-Haram. He stood in the place known as al-Hijr facing the Kabah and began to pray. Fatimah stood at his side. A group of Quraysh, by no means well-disposed to the Prophet, gathered about him. They included Abu Jahl ibn Hisham, the Prophet's uncle, Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, and Shaybah and Utbah, sons of Rabi'ah. Menacingly, the group went up to the Prophet and Abu Jahl, the ringleader, asked:

"Which of you can bring the entrails of a slaughtered animal and throw it on Muhammad?"

Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt, one of the vilest of the lot, volunteered and hurried off. He returned with the obnoxious filth and threw it on the shoulders of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, while he was still prostrating. Abdullah ibn Masud, a companion of the Prophet, was present but he was powerless to do or say anything.

Imagine the feelings of Fatimah as she saw her father being treated in this fashion. What could she, a girl not ten years old, do? She went up to her father and removed the offensive matter and then stood firmly

and angrily before the group of Quraysh thugs and lashed out against them. Not a single word did they say to her. The noble Prophet raised his head on completion of the prostration and went on to complete the Salat. He then said: "O Lord, may you punish the Quraysh!" and repeated this imprecation three times. Then he continued:

"May You punish Utbah, Uqbah, Abu Jahl and Shaybah." (These whom he named were all killed many years later at the Battle of Badr)

On another occasion, Fatimah was with the Prophet as he made; tawaf around the Kabah. A Quraysh mob gathered around him. They seized him and tried to strangle him with his own clothes. Fatimah screamed and shouted for help. Abu Bakr rushed to the scene and managed to free the Prophet. While he was doing so, he pleaded: "Would you kill a man who says, 'My Lord is God?'" Far from giving up, the mob turned on Abu Bakr and began beating him until blood flowed from his head and face.

Such scenes of vicious opposition and harassment against her father and the early Muslims were witnessed by the young Fatimah. She did not meekly stand aside but joined in the struggle in defence of her father and his noble mission. She was still a young girl and instead of the cheerful romping, the gaiety and liveliness which children of her age are and should normally be accustomed to, Fatimah had to witness and participate in such ordeals.

Of course, she was not alone in this. The whole of the Prophet's family suffered from the violent and mindless Quraysh. Her sisters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum also suffered. They were living at this time in the very nest of hatred and intrigue against the Prophet. Their husbands were Utbah and Utaybah, sons of Abu Lahab and Umm Jamil. Umm Jamil was known to be a hard and harsh woman who had a sharp and evil tongue. It was mainly because of her that Khadijah was not pleased with the marriages of her daughters to Umm Jamil's sons in the first place. It must have been painful for Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum to be living in the household of such inveterate enemies who not only joined but led the campaign against their father.

As a mark of disgrace to Muhammad and his family, Utbah and Utaybah were prevailed upon by their parents to divorce their wives. This was part of the process of ostracizing the Prophet totally. The Prophet in fact welcomed his daughters back to his home with joy, happiness and relief.

Fatimah, no doubt, must have been happy to be with her sisters once again. They all wished that their eldest sister, Zaynab, would also be divorced by her husband. In fact, the Quraysh brought pressure on Abu-l Aas to do so but he refused. When the Quraysh leaders came up to him and promised him the richest and most beautiful woman as a wife should he divorce Zaynab, he replied:

"I love my wife deeply and passionately and I have a great and high esteem for her father even though I have not entered the religion of Islam."

Both Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum were happy to be back with their loving parents and to be rid of the unbearable mental torture to which they had been subjected in the house of Umm Jamil. Shortly afterwards, Ruqayyah married again, to the young and shy Uthman ibn Allan who was among the first to have accepted Islam. They both left for Abyssinia among the first muhajirin who sought refuge in that land and stayed there for several years. Fatimah was not to see Ruqayyah again until after their mother had died.

The persecution of the Prophet, his family and his followers continued and even became worse after the migration of the first Muslims to Abyssinia. In about the seventh year of his mission, the Prophet and his family were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in a rugged little valley enclosed by hills on all sides and defile, which could only be entered from Makkah by a narrow path.

To this arid valley, Muhammad and the clans of Banu Hashim and al-Muttalib were forced to retire with limited supplies of food. Fatimah was one of the youngest members of the clans -just about twelve years

old - and had to undergo months of hardship and suffering. The wailing of hungry children and women in the valley could be heard from Makkah. The Quraysh allowed no food and contact with the Muslims whose hardship was only relieved somewhat during the season of pilgrimage. The boycott lasted for three years. When it was lifted, the Prophet had to face even more trials and difficulties. Khadijah, the faithful and loving, died shortly afterwards. With her death, the Prophet and his family lost one of the greatest sources of comfort and strength which had sustained them through the difficult period. The year in which the noble Khadijah, and later Abu Talib, died is known as the Year of Sadness. Fatimah, now a young lady, was greatly distressed by her mother's death. She wept bitterly and for some time was so grief-stricken that her health deteriorated. It was even feared she might die of grief.

Although her older sister, Umm Kulthum, stayed in the same household, Fatimah realized that she now had a greater responsibility with the passing away of her mother. She felt that she had to give even greater support to her father. With loving tenderness, she devoted herself to looking after his needs. So concerned was she for his welfare that she came to be called "Umm Abi-ha the mother of her father". She also provided him with solace and comfort during times of trial, difficulty and crisis.

Often the trials were too much for her. Once, about this time, an insolent mob heaped dust and earth upon his gracious head. As he entered his home, Fatimah wept profusely as she wiped the dust from her father's head.

"Do not cry, my daughter," he said, "for God shall protect your father." The Prophet had a special love for Fatimah. He once said: "Whoever pleased Fatimah has indeed pleased God and whoever has caused her to be angry has indeed angered God. Fatimah is a part of me. Whatever pleases her pleases me and whatever angers her angers me."

He also said: "The best women in all the world are four: the Virgin Mary, Aasiyaa the wife of Pharaoh, Khadijah Mother of the Believers, and Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad." Fatimah thus acquired a place of love and esteem in the Prophet's heart that was only occupied by his wife Khadijah.

Fatimah, may God be pleased with her, was given the title of "az-Zahraa" which means "the Resplendent One". That was because of her beaming face which seemed to radiate light. It is said that when she stood for Prayer, the mihrab would reflect the light of her countenance. She was also called "al-Batul" because of her asceticism. Instead of spending her time in the company of women, much of her time would be spent in Salat, in reading the Quran and in other acts of ibadah.

Fatimah had a strong resemblance to her father, the Messenger of God. Aishah, the wife of the Prophet, said of her: "I have not seen any one of God's creation resemble the Messenger of God more in speech, conversation and manner of sitting than Fatimah, may God be pleased with her. When the Prophet saw her approaching, he would welcome her, stand up and kiss her, take her by the hand and sit her down in the place where he was sitting." She would do the same when the Prophet came to her. She would stand up and welcome him with joy and kiss him.

Fatimah's fine manners and gentle speech were part of her lovely and endearing personality. She was especially kind to poor and indigent folk and would often give all the food she had to those in need even if she herself remained hungry. She had no craving for the ornaments of this world nor the luxury and comforts of life. She lived simply, although on occasion as we shall see circumstances seemed to be too much and too difficult for her.

She inherited from her father a persuasive eloquence that was rooted in wisdom. When she spoke, people would often be moved to tears. She had the ability and the sincerity to stir the emotions, move people to tears and fill their hearts with praise and gratitude to God for His grace and His inestimable bounties.

Fatimah migrated to Madinah a few weeks after the Prophet did. She went with Zayd ibn Harithah who was sent by the Prophet back to Makkah to bring the rest of his family. The party included Fatimah and Umm Kulthum, Sawdah, the Prophet's wife, Zayd's wife Barakah and her son Usamah. Travelling with the

group also were Abdullah the son of Abu Bakr who accompanied his mother and his sisters, Aishah and Asma.

In Madinah, Fatimah lived with her father in the simple dwelling he had built adjoining the mosque. In the second year after the Hijrah, she received proposals of marriage through her father, two of which were turned down. Then Ali, the son of Abu Talib, plucked up courage and went to the Prophet to ask for her hand in marriage. In the presence of the Prophet, however, Ali became over-awed and tongue-tied. He stared at the ground and could not say anything. The Prophet then asked: "Why have you come? Do you need something?" Ali still could not speak and then the Prophet suggested: "Perhaps you have come to propose marriage to Fatimah."

"Yes," replied Ali. At this, according to one report, the Prophet said simply: "Marhaban wa ahlan - Welcome into the family," and this was taken by Ali and a group of Ansar who were waiting outside for him as indicating the Prophet's approval. Another report indicated that the Prophet approved and went on to ask Ali if he had anything to give as mahr. Ali replied that he didn't. The Prophet reminded him that he had a shield which could be sold.

Ali sold the shield to Uthman for four hundred dirhams and as he was hurrying back to the Prophet to hand over the sum as mahr, Uthman stopped him and said:

"I am returning your shield to you as a present from me on your marriage to Fatimah." Fatimah and Ali were thus married most probably at the beginning of the second year after the Hijrah. She was about nineteen years old at the time and Ali was about twenty one. The Prophet himself performed the marriage ceremony. At the walimah, the guests were served with dates, figs and hais (a mixture of dates and butter fat). A leading member of the Ansar donated a ram and others made offerings of grain. All Madinah rejoiced.

On her marriage, the Prophet is said to have presented Fatimah and Ali with a wooden bed intertwined with palm leaves, a velvet coverlet, a leather cushion filled with palm fibre, a sheepskin, a pot, a waterskin and a quern for grinding grain.

Fatimah left the home of her beloved father for the first time to begin life with her husband. The Prophet was clearly anxious on her account and sent Barakah with her should she be in need of any help. And no doubt Barakah was a source of comfort and solace to her. The Prophet prayed for them:

"O Lord, bless them both, bless their house and bless their offspring." In Ali's humble dwelling, there was only a sheepskin for a bed. In the morning after the wedding night, the Prophet went to Ali's house and knocked on the door.

Barakah came out and the Prophet said to her: "O Umm Ayman, call my brother for me."

"Your brother? That's the one who married your daughter?" asked Barakah somewhat incredulously as if to say: Why should the Prophet call Ali his "brother"? (He referred to Ali as his brother because just as pairs of Muslims were joined in brotherhood after the Hijrah, so the Prophet and Ali were linked as "brothers".)

The Prophet repeated what he had said in a louder voice. Ali came and the Prophet made a du'a, invoking the blessings of God on him. Then he asked for Fatimah. She came almost cringing with a mixture of awe and shyness and the Prophet said to her:

"I have married you to the dearest of my family to me." In this way, he sought to reassure her. She was not starting life with a complete stranger but with one who had grown up in the same household, who was among the first to become a Muslim at a tender age, who was known for his courage, bravery and virtue, and whom the Prophet described as his "brother in this world and the hereafter".

Fatimah's life with Ali was as simple and frugal as it was in her father's household. In fact, so far as material comforts were concerned, it was a life of hardship and deprivation. Throughout their life together, Ali remained poor because he did not set great store by material wealth. Fatimah was the only one of her sisters who was not married to a wealthy man.

In fact, it could be said that Fatimah's life with Ali was even more rigorous than life in her father's home. At least before marriage, there were always a number of ready helping hands in the Prophet's household. But now she had to cope virtually on her own. To relieve the extreme poverty, Ali worked as a drawer and carrier of water and she as a grinder of corn. One day she said to Ali: "I have ground until my hands are blistered."

"I have drawn water until I have pains in my chest," said Ali and went on to suggest to Fatimah: "God has given your father some captives of war, so go and ask him to give you a servant."

Reluctantly, she went to the Prophet who said: "What has brought you here, my little daughter?" "I came to give you greetings of peace," she said, for in awe of him she could not bring herself to ask what she had intended.

"What did you do?" asked Ali when she returned alone.

"I was ashamed to ask him," she said. So the two of them went together but the Prophet felt they were less in need than others.

"I will not give to you," he said, "and let the Ahl as-Suffah (poor Muslims who stayed in the mosque) be tormented with hunger. I have not enough for their keep..."

Ali and Fatimah returned home feeling somewhat dejected but that night, after they had gone to bed, they heard the voice of the Prophet asking permission to enter. Welcoming him, they both rose to their feet, but he told them:

"Stay where you are," and sat down beside them. "Shall I not tell you of something better than that which you asked of me?" he asked and when they said yes he said: "Words which Jibril taught me, that you should say "Subhaan Allah- Glory be to God" ten times after every Prayer, and ten times "Al hamdu lillah - Praise be to God," and ten times "Allahu Akbar - God is Great." And that when you go to bed you should say them thirty-three times each."

Ali used to say in later years: "I have never once failed to say them since the Messenger of God taught them to us."

There are many reports of the hard and difficult times which Fatimah had to face. Often there was no food in her house. Once the Prophet was hungry. He went to one after another of his wives' apartments but there was no food. He then went to Fatimah's house and she had no food either. When he eventually got some food, he sent two loaves and a piece of meat to Fatimah. At another time, he went to the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari and from the food he was given, he saved some for her. Fatimah also knew that the Prophet was without food for long periods and she in turn would take food to him when she could. Once she took a piece of barley bread and he, said to her: "This is the first food your father has eaten for three days."

Through these acts of kindness she showed how much she loved her father; and he loved her, really loved her in return.

Once he returned from a journey outside Madinah. He went to the mosque first of all and prayed two rakats as was his custom. Then, as he often did, he went to Fatimah's house before going to his wives. Fatimah welcomed him and kissed his face, his mouth and his eyes and cried. "Why do you cry?" the Prophet asked. "I see you, O Rasul Allah," she said, "Your color is pale and sallow and your clothes have

become worn and shabby." "O Fatimah," the Prophet replied tenderly, "don't cry for Allah has sent your father with a mission which He would cause to affect every house on the face of the earth whether it be in towns, villages or tents (in the desert) bringing either glory or humiliation until this mission is fulfilled just as night (inevitably) comes." With such comments Fatimah was often taken from the harsh realities of daily life to get a glimpse of the vast and far-reaching vistas opened up by the mission entrusted to her noble father.

Fatimah eventually returned to live in a house close to that of the Prophet. The place was donated by an Ansari who knew that the Prophet would rejoice in having his daughter as his neighbor. Together they shared in the joys and the triumphs, the sorrows and the hardships of the crowded and momentous Madinah days and years.

In the middle of the second year after the Hijrah, her sister Ruqayyah fell ill with fever and measles. This was shortly before the great campaign of Badr. Uthman, her husband, stayed by her bedside and missed the campaign. Ruqayyah died just before her father returned. On his return to Madinah, one of the first acts of the Prophet was to visit her grave.

Fatimah went with him. This was the first bereavement they had suffered within their closest family since the death of Khadijah. Fatimah was greatly distressed by the loss of her sister. The tears poured from her eyes as she sat beside her father at the edge of the grave, and he comforted her and sought to dry her tears with the corner of his cloak.

The Prophet had previously spoken against lamentations for the dead, but this had led to a misunderstanding, and when they returned from the cemetery the voice of Umar was heard raised in anger against the women who were weeping for the martyrs of Badr and for Ruqayyah.

"Umar, let them weep," he said and then added: "What comes from the heart and from the eye, that is from God and His mercy, but what comes from the hand and from the tongue, that is from Satan." By the hand he meant the beating of breasts and the smiting of cheeks, and by the tongue he meant the loud clamor in which women often joined as a mark of public sympathy.

Uthman later married the other daughter of the Prophet, Umm Kulthum, and on this account came to be known as Dhu-n Nurayn - Possessor of the Two Lights.

The bereavement which the family suffered by the death of Ruqayyah was followed by happiness when to the great joy of all the believers Fatimah gave birth to a boy in Ramadan of the third year after the Hijrah. The Prophet spoke the words of the Adhan into the ear of the new-born babe and called him al-Hasan which means the Beautiful One.

One year later, she gave birth to another son who was

called al-Husayn, which means "little Hasan" or the little beautiful one. Fatimah would often bring her two sons to see their grandfather who was exceedingly fond of them. Later he would take them to the Mosque and they would climb onto his back when he prostrated. He did the same with his little granddaughter Umamah, the daughter of Zaynab.

In the eighth year after the Hijrah, Fatimah gave birth to a third child, a girl whom she named after her eldest sister Zaynab who had died shortly before her birth. This Zaynab was to grow up and become famous as the "Heroine of Karbala". Fatimah's fourth child was born in the year after the Hijrah. The child was also a girl and Fatimah named her Umm Kulthum after her sister who had died the year before after an illness.

It was only through Fatimah that the progeny of the Prophet was perpetuated. All the Prophet's male children had died in their infancy and the two children of Zaynab named Ali and Umamah died young. Ruqayyah's child Abdullah also died when he was not yet two years old. This is an added reason for the

reverence which is accorded to Fatimah.

Although Fatimah was so often busy with pregnancies and giving birth and rearing children, she took as much part as she could in the affairs of the growing Muslim community of Madinah. Before her marriage, she acted as a sort of hostess to the poor and destitute Ahl as-Suffah. As soon as the Battle of Uhud was over, she went with other women to the battlefield and wept over the dead martyrs and took time to dress her father's wounds. At the Battle of the Ditch, she played a major supportive role together with other women in preparing food during the long and difficult siege. In her camp, she led the Muslim women in prayer and on that place there stands a mosque named Masjid Fatimah, one of seven mosques where the Muslims stood guard and performed their devotions.

Fatimah also accompanied the Prophet when he made Umrah in the sixth year after the Hijrah after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. In the following year, she and her sister Umm Kulthum, were among the mighty throng of Muslims who took part with the Prophet in the liberation of Makkah. It is said that on this occasion, both Fatimah and Umm Kulthum visited the home of their mother Khadijah and recalled memories of their childhood and memories of jihad, of long struggles in the early years of the Prophet's mission.

In Ramadan of the tenth year just before he went on his Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet confided to Fatimah, as a secret not yet to be told to others:

"

Jibril recited the Quran to me and I to him once every year, but this year he has recited it with me twice. I cannot but think that my time has come."

On his return from the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet did become seriously ill. His final days were spent in the apartment of his wife Aishah. When Fatimah came to visit him, Aishah would leave father and daughter together.

One day he summoned Fatimah. When she came, he kissed her and whispered some words in her ear. She wept. Then again he whispered in her ear and she smiled. Aishah saw and asked:

"You cry and you laugh at the same time, Fatimah? What did the Messenger of God say to you?" Fatimah replied:

"He first told me that he would meet his Lord after a short while and so I cried. Then he said to me: 'Don't cry for you will be the first of my household to join me.' So I laughed."

Not long afterwards the noble Prophet passed away. Fatimah was grief-stricken and she would often be seen weeping profusely. One of the companions noted that he did not see Fatimah, may God be pleased with her, laugh after the death of her father.

One morning, early in the month of Ramadan, just less than five months after her noble father had passed away, Fatimah woke up looking unusually happy and full of mirth. In the afternoon of that day, it is said that she called Salma bint Umayyad who was looking after her. She asked for some water and had a bath. She then put on new clothes and perfumed herself. She then asked Salma to put her bed in the courtyard of the house. With her face looking to the heavens above, she asked for her husband Ali.

He was taken aback when he saw her lying in the middle of the courtyard and asked her what was wrong. She smiled and said: "I have an appointment today with the Messenger of God."

Ali cried and she tried to console him. She told him to look after their sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn and advised that she should be buried without ceremony. She gazed upwards again, then closed her eyes and surrendered her soul to the Mighty Creator.

She, Fatimah the Resplendent One, was just twenty nine years old.

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