

It is once again the month in which we remember the honorable daughter of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family). Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her) is also the wife and the mother in her familial roles in the household of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). One of the striking features of this lady's life is that although due to her death at an early age her children had been deprived of her motherly care for them, she left a lasting impact on their lives as long as they lived. We frequently read in the history the way al-Hasan and al-Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum remembered their dear mother on several occasions in their confrontation with injustices and cruelties they suffered in the hands of those who neglected to understand their lofty status within the household of the Prophet. What was the secret of such a lasting impact in the lives of the future leaders of the umma left by Fatima Zahra, their mother?

We are living in an age when communication has become both easy and difficult.

Modern technology has increased the means of communication and we are enjoying the fruits of such scientific innovation in establishing contacts with one another. Imagine how difficult it was to make a phone call while you were on road or to send a message if you were in an airplane 30,000 feet above the earth? Today all those hurdles are removed and there is no excuse left for not connecting with anyone we wish to communicate.

However, the demands of modern living have also made it unexpectedly difficult to maintain normal human relationships that are essential part of our divinely ordained social nature. And although we are now electronically in connection with a wide circle of people, the more we think about the tyranny of e-mail service the more we realize that something essential is missing in our ability to communicate so easily. This is the human "touch." It is connectedness and the expectations that go with it in terms of human touch and human ability to communicate with one's entire existence that is missing. From eye to hand to different parts of our body we have been able to communicate, sometimes, without uttering a single word. That human sensitivity with our total being is something that modern technology of communication has not been able to replace electronically. It is important to emphasize here that the need to communicate is not limited between humans and humans; even our ability to communicate with our Creator, the Almighty Compassionate God has been adversely impacted by the pace of life that we experience today. We find ourselves hurrying to finish our prayers (if at all we pray!) and attend to sometimes very trivial chores. We don't communicate with our beloved Creator the way we ought to, as reflected in the prayers of *Sahifa Sajjadiya*, in which Imam Zaynul Abidin communicates with God in all humility and love that he has for the Divine Being.

The Qur'an speaks about the ways in which God communicated with human beings throughout history to guide them to realize their full potential in life. The Prophets were sent to teach humanity how to become full members of human community by learning to communicate with each other about one's needs and expectations. Through their role model and divine guidance the Prophets introduced religious practices which communicate the importance of coming together, whether while praying individually or

in congregation. It is instructive to remember that in the most critical institution of daily worship (*salat, namaz*) the emphasis is on spiritual communication with God, and moral communication with other humans from whom we expect mutual responsiveness and responsibility. One of the most demanding and critical area of communication today is between us and our young ones-our children. As parents we have discovered that not only are we teaching language to our children as we take care of them, we are constantly communicating to them our spiritual and moral values which we adhere to and which are part of our Muslim identity.

Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her) is not only the mother of her children; she left an incredibly sustainable integrity and influence with all her descendants, in particular the Imams who always made sure that they reminded each other about their lineage going back to Sayyida Siddiqa (the Lady of Truthfulness). It is not without reason that even the Prophet regarded his daughter as “Her Father’s Mother” (*umm abiha*). Fatima Zahra’s ability to console her own father as he struggled to teach God’s revealed religion, al-Islam, is self-evident in all historical sources. Whether teaching Islam in the mosque or while preaching to the Arab tribes of the Jahiliya, the Prophet was constantly faced with disappointments and suffered pain and abuse from the unbelievers. At the end of each mission he came back in Bayt al-Sharaf (the Honorable House) of Fatima and talked about the matter to her. Fatima was not only sympathetic listener, she also communicated to her father her own understanding of Islamic mission and lending her and her family’s wholehearted support to it.

Little wonder then that Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her) left a strong spiritual and moral legacy to her children and their descendants. Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq used to fondly mention his “grandmother (*bint rasulillah*)” at different times as he sought examples of patience, truth and justice for his disciples when he related the sufferings of the Family of the Prophet to them. The way the Prophet’s beloved daughter communicated with her children has been preserved in Imam Hasan’s narrative about his mother. Imam Hasan (peace be upon him), who used to be around to watch his mother pray and then invoke God’s mercy on all their neighbors, one day asked his mother: “O mother, you pray for everyone in the neighborhood, but you don’t ask for anything for yourself from God, the Exalted.” Fatima in her own ways responded to her son: “When God grants good to everyone in the vicinity He surely grants the petitioner without specifically asking for anything!” This remained the lesson so beautifully communicated by Fatima Zahra that Imam Hasan throughout his life remained generous and forgiving to everyone, including those who were his diehard enemies. We see the same impact of their mother’s communication on Fatima Zahra’s other children, especially Imam Husayn, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthum (peace be upon all of them) in the tragedy of Karbala’. Allamah Iqbal has captured that role model of Fatima in these words in his *Mathnavi*:

Maryam is dear [to us all] because she is related to Jesus.

Hazrate Zahra is dear [to us all] because of three relations.

She is the daughter of the Mercy for All Beings [Hazrat Muhammad];
She is the wife of the one who wore the crown of Hal Ata [Hazrat Ali];
She is the mother of the center of the compass of Love [Hazrat Hasan];
And the mother of the leader of that caravan of Love [Hazrat Husayn].

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