

PRESS RELEASE – THE WOMEN OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

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The most powerful and influential women in 6th century Arabia have emerged from none other than the very household of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. As a champion for the rights of women and their emancipator in an era of great repression and moral decadence, Prophet Muhammad ensured that the women of his household stood as a practical testament to the principles he preached. His wives, daughters and granddaughters were the epitome of the true representation of the free and confident Muslim woman under the newly charted constitution of Islam, the Holy Quran.

Prophet Muhammad's tacit endorsement of feminism began at a young age, with his willingness to work for one of the indisputably rare entities of early 6th century Meccan society: a female employer. The sole heiress to a foreign trade empire, Lady Khadijatul Kubra was historically considered to be the wealthiest woman of her time, boldly daring to assert herself in a male-dominated world of caravan trade. An astute and self-assured business woman who owned large fleets of caravans and Arabian horses of pedigree, she was known to be a superb administrator and organizer, ably managing a colossal workforce consisting entirely of males. Unimpressed by any man's wealth, rank or power, Lady Khadija was drawn, instead, to Prophet Muhammad's outstanding qualities and moral principles. She made the unprecedented step in Arabian culture of proposing marriage to Prophet Muhammad and he responded with the equally unprecedented act of accepting a proposal put forth by a woman.

History shows that Prophet Muhammad's child, Lady Fatima, would follow in the footsteps of her mother and ultimately prove to be an equally formidable woman in her own right. With her coming of age, the home of the Messenger of Islam became an institution of learning where the women of Medina flocked in great numbers to be educated and trained by the young lady of the house.

Able to read and write, Lady Fatima was a known scholar who under the supervision and training of her illustrious father, taught the women not only the tenets of the faith but also guided the women on the rights accorded to them by Islam.

Historically recorded narratives of the companions of the Messenger of Islam show that Prophet Muhammad frequently welcomed his veiled daughter at gatherings where he

consulted her on topics pointedly showing a great level of attachment to the female child in a society well-known for female infanticide. Often, he would direct queries addressed to him to be referred directly to his knowledgeable daughter.

It was Lady Fatima who continued Prophet Muhammad's fervent advocacy for the right of women to inherit in an ironic turn of historic events that saw her fighting for her own right to inherit her father's land after his death. Representing herself in the court of the Caliph (Head of State), she expertly cited references from the Holy Quran upon which the governing constitutional rights for women to inherit were entirely based. Her eloquent and remarkably fiery address continues to be one of the most quoted speeches of archived historical court records from Arabian society and an example of self-assertion for Muslim women to follow over the centuries.

Lady Fatima's two daughters, Lady Zaynab and Lady Kulthoom are considered to be unparalleled and exceedingly influential links in the lineage of legendary personalities who were trained on the lap and in the household of Muhammad himself. After the assassination of their father, Ali, who was the 4th Caliph, these renowned daughters were in a desert massacre that saw all but two of their male relatives butchered in a brutal ambush ordered by the newly appointed emperor, Yazid. Captured as prisoners with other family members and companions, the ladies were bound by ropes, whipped and made to walk hundreds of miles through the Arabian desert to the dark dungeons where they were held captive in the most horrendous of conditions.

Despite this, history shows that the granddaughters of Prophet Muhammad exhibited incredible resilience. Bravely addressing the assembled crowds in the streets of Damascus and later at the high profile dignitaries in the court of the ruling tyrant, Yazid, Lady Zaynab fearlessly raised her voice against injustice.

Recorded and archived by court historians, Lady Zaynab's famous and widely-quoted speeches, confidently uttered in an era where women dared not speak aloud, are an astounding example of great eloquence and heroic courage in the face of death and torture.

Her bold challenge of Yazid's authority, fearless questioning of his oppressive actions and unhesitating advocacy for human rights shook the Arab world and were a pivotal influence in significant historical events to follow. She revealed that it was her grandfather, Prophet Muhammad, who had mentally prepared her for the political events of the Islamic empire that he could foresee in the near future. It was he who had made her promise to stand up for justice and it was he who had reminded her to believe in her strength as a woman.

Lady Zaynab's lasting message and her widespread influence almost 1400 years following her death are a true indication of the enduring impact of her powerful personality. Thousands pay respect every day at her grave as it rests in an opulent gold domed shrine in the heart of Damascus.

Lady Zaynab's voice against injustice still reverberates loud and rings true and yet many attempt to silence it even from the grave fourteen centuries after her death.

Islam is a religion of harmony and peace. The world should not allow any destruction of this or other sacred shrines.

Emboldened by the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and supported by the Messenger who taught them to believe in themselves through their very faith, the powerful women trained in the household of Prophet Muhammad continue to remain a force to contend with.

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