

Chastity Taught by the Holy Qur'an and Fatimah Al-Zahra(SA)

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Undoubtedly chastity and accordingly modest proper covering (Hijab) is both necessary for the well-being and security of the society and also for the protection of the honour and human dignity of the society's members in particular the women. In fact, chastity in Islam is regarded as a moral virtue related to worship of God and guaranteeing human happiness. In the Holy Qur'an, the believing girls and women are advised: *“O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and believers' wives as well, to draw their cloaks close around themselves. That is more appropriate so they may be recognized and not molested. God is Forgiving, Merciful.”* Al-Ahzab: 59

The expressions 'Efaf and Effat' are very meaningful and are according to Islamic theologians, the opposite of waywardness, selfishness and immodesty. 'Afif' is applied to the one who possesses 'Efaf', namely chastity, piety and self-restraint in the face of passions and carnal desires. Let's cite this verse of the Holy Qur'an for more clarification, *“Take care of the poor who, being totally absorbed in working for God's cause, cannot manage to travel [freely] around the earth seeking the livelihood. An ignorant person might assume they are rich because of their modesty; yet you will recognize them from their features, they do not make insistent demands on people. Yet God is Aware of any money you may so spend.”* Al-Baqarah: 273

Also in chapter 24 of the Holy Qur'an we read about Qur'anic teachings on chastity: *“Yet let those who do not find [any way to] marry, hold off until God enriches them out of His bounty. Should those whom your right hands control desire their freedom, then draw up such a writ for them if you recognize anything worthwhile in them. Give them some of*

God's Wealth which He has given you. Do not force your girls [whom you control] into prostitution so that you may seek the display of worldly life, if they want to preserve their chastity. Anyone who forces them to do other-wise) [will find] God is Forgiving, Merciful, even after forcing them to.” Al- Nur: 33

In Nahjul Balaghah (Hikmah 60) we read a Hadith from Imam Ali (AS) about ‘Efaf’ which says: “Efaf beautifies destitution.” As we see ‘Efaf’ meaning self-restraint, self-control and piety has been applied in Islamic teachings to denote self-restraint and dignified, honourable behaviour both in the face of sexual urges and also when one is under other pressures such as hunger and poverty. The significance of ‘Efaf’ can be understood just through a study of the conditions and fate of various peoples and societies; the societies blessed with ‘Efaf’ have prospered and those entangled in passions have suffered decadence and lots of miseries. Now let's talk about the greatest symbol of ‘Efaf’, chastity, dignity and piety - the endeared daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – Her Holiness Fatimah (SA). Islamic history is witness to the fact that she was the perfect symbol of a truly faithful lady, an exalted Muslim woman, that she stood at the peak of Godliness and possessed all moral virtues to the fullest extent, that she was free from even the least bit of selfishness and that she lived for God in every respect, to the last moment of her blessed life.

About her piety and obeying Divine Commands, writing even hundreds of books will not be enough, and so here we content ourselves with citing just a few narrations: “Her Holiness Fatimah(SA) was tremendously careful about the Islamic decrees on chastity and Hijab (as with other Islamic decrees) and would avoid the non-Mahram with praiseworthy care.” It has been narrated that one day a blind man entered the room where both the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his beloved

daughter were sitting. Upon his entrance, Her Holiness got up and left the room, and in reply to those who said that the man was blind so there was no reason for her leaving the room, Her Holiness said: “True, he does not see me, but I see him....” Hearing this reply, the Holy Prophet(PBUH) expressed his approval and admiration of his exalted daughter and said: “I bear witness that you are part of me.”

Also, it has been narrated that one day the Holy Prophet (PBUH) of Islam, asked the opinions of the audience at the mosque about women’s happiness through this question: “What is best for women?” The people present at the mosque gave some answers yet a very knowledgeable devout companion of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) preferred to ask that question from Her Holiness Fatimah (SA) whom he knew to be at the peak of knowledge and wisdom and so he went to the house of Her Holiness and asked her to reply to that. In reply Her Holiness said: “The best thing for women is not to see non-Mahram men and also not to be seen by non-Mahram men.” Then Salman returned to the mosque and uttered that very wise reply given him by Her Holiness Fatimah (SA). The Holy Prophet (PBUH) asked Salman, whom he had received that reply from and was told by him that the reply was given by Her Holiness Fatimah (SA). Upon hearing this, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: “May her father's life be for her. Truly Fatimah is part of me.”

These narrations clearly point to the highness of the moral level and devotion of Her Holiness Fatimah (SA) to Islamic teachings. Of course there is no denying that Islam allows women's useful, and/or necessary presence in society, for social, economic, cultural and political activities but as per these life-giving narrations, it is better for a woman to avoid contact with non-Mahram males as far as possible and moreover, when she has to appear in public, she should be properly covered and also not wearing attractive clothings, perfumes and the like. These Divine

teachings are no doubt for the health, security, happiness of women as well as the society.

Another praiseworthy aspect of the exalted position of Her Holiness has been her devotion to her husband, housekeeping and raising pious children. In fact, being a good wife for a woman has been mentioned by Her Holiness as being reward-worthy equal to struggle in the way of Allah. It is indeed worthwhile to mention that in a hadith Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) while interpreting verse 12 of chapter 66 (about the chastity of Maryam binte 'Umran said: "Truly Fatimah (SA) too guarded her chastity and so Allah guarded her household and offsprings against the Fire."

Accordingly, Imam Ali(AS), the esteemed husband of that most exalted lady of all times has stated: "The greatest '*Ibadah* (worship of God) is Efaf. 'Efaf' according to this Hadith is self-restraint both in the face of sexual desires and in the face of desire for food and the like..." , as Imam al-Baqir(AS) has said: "To Allah no '*Ibadah*' is more rewarding than Efaf (self-restraint, self-control) in the face of the urges of belly and of sex." and also "When Allah desires good for a servant, He will help him overcome sexual passions and passions for food, achieving Efaf in the face of such passions."

Likewise, in a Hadith, Imam al-Sadiq(AS) has described his true followers thus: "...They guard themselves against illegitimate sexual desires, gluttony and struggle hard in the way of serving and obeying Allah and they hope for Allah's Compassion and fear His Wrath and so they invariably move in the path of the truth. If you see someone with these qualities, know that he is one of my followers."

As for chastity and self-control in situations related to sexual desires, let's mention a Hadith from the Infallible (AS): "The one who desires

chastity for his own family, should behave chastely towards the others.” This Hadith clearly teaches us that truly chaste people will enjoy the blessing of a family protected against unchaste conduct by the others, among other blessings and needless to say, women's carelessness about Hijab will be a severe blow to the society's morality, causing lots of harms, such as the break-up of families and corruption.

Accordingly, the so-called freedom of relations between men and women so prevalent in today's Western societies, as well as immoral films and corrupting reading material should be regarded as ruinous to humane life, human soul and human societies and should thus be fought against.

To conclude, it should be said that Allah has, in His Mercy and Compassion, presented the best role models for us to follow for our happiness and salvation, Her Holiness Fatimah al-Zahra (SA) - the most excellent of them - she perfectly acted upon the teachings of Allah. She prayed to Allah most sincerely and also acted most chastely throughout her blessed life, and advised all to follow the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.