

THE **F1RST**S

A Lecture Series

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Saffiyah Bint Abdul Muttalib

A Warrior Aunt

Saffiyah Bint Abdul Mutallib (ra) raised a lion in her son Zubayr, who was one of the first to accept Islam. It is necessary to understand the biography of his mother to fully understand his story. She was the closest sibling to another lion: her brother Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib (ra). To understand what came out of her home, it's crucial to examine her incredible story of strength and resilience.

An Important Influence

The Prophet ﷺ had four famous uncles, Hamza, Abu Talib, Abu Lahab, and Al-Abbas. He had ten-twelve uncles. Abu Talib was the oldest (his actual name was Abdi Manaf), followed by Hamza, Al-Abbas, Abu Lahab (his actual name was Abd El Uzza). Other uncles were Al Zubayr, Al Harith, Al Mugheera, Al Mukawwim, Dhithar, Kussum, and Musa'b. Most of the uncles passed before Prophet Mohammad ﷺ received revelation, and Hamza and Al-Abbas were the only uncles to embrace Islam.

The Prophet ﷺ also had six paternal aunts: Safiyyah, Um Hakeem, Atika, Umaymah, Arwa, and Barra. The only paternal aunt who embraced Islam was Safiyyah.

Saffiyah was only a year or less old than Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. She was very close to her brother Hamza because they were close in age. She grew up with the Prophet ﷺ and was more like his sister. Her biography revolves around her brother Hamza. She married Al Harith ibn Harb, the older brother of Abu Sufyan. After he passed, she married Awam ibn Khawaylid, who is the brother of Khadijah. They had three sons, Al Zubayr, Al Saib, Ibn el Kaab (who died at a young age). Her husband died while her two remaining sons were very young, so she was left to raise her sons as a single mom. She did not remarry.

Raising Strong Men

She raised her sons with strict discipline. She did not want him to be raised disadvantaged because he was an orphan. She wanted them to be independent, courageous, intelligent, and strong. Before Islam, life as an orphan was tough, so she wanted to make sure her sons would not be taken advantage of in society. She was a unique character, and her influence, especially on her son, Zubayr, was evident.

Nawfal ibn Kawaylid (her brother-in-law) told her that she disciplined Zubayr as if she hated him. She replied in poetry, explaining that she disciplined him harshly because she wants him to be strong and successful in his life.

When Zubayr came to her, at the age of 18, to declare to her that he accepted Islam, she argued with him at first because she knew this would make his life even harder. She asked Nawfal to help her with the situation, who proceeded to torture him to change his mind about Islam.

She eventually accepted Islam herself when Hamza became Muslim. She was inseparable from him throughout her life. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was very close to her as well.

Strength as a Woman, Mother and Sister

Saffiyah was very capable of defending herself, her sons, and the Prophet ﷺ. When news of the death at Uhud came out, people came running to find their family members. When Prophet Muhammad ﷺ found Hamza, he told Zubayr to find Saffiyah and told him not to let his mother see what had become of the body of Hamza. As he tried to stop her, she insisted on going to the battlefield with a dagger. She only stopped when Zubayr told her “the Prophet ﷺ asks you to stop,” saying “I heard and I obey.” Eventually, she was allowed to see Hamza, and she stood all night over his body repeating, “Certainly to Allah we belong and certainly to Him we will return, Oh Allah forgive him, Oh Allah I seek his reward for this loss from you.” She brought the wrapping cloth for him to be prepared in.

Strength as a Fighter

During the Battle of the Trench (Khandaq), when approached by a man from the enemy, checking if there were any men among them, she hit him with a pole, killing him and threw his body, so the rest of his group assumed there was a large army and retreated. So she saved everyone in that fortress with her bravery.

Because of her courage, when Zubayr grew up to be courageous as well, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ called him Zubayr ibn (son of) Saffiyah.

She wrote poetry and described the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as “the sun wrapped up in darkness but still somehow shining,” because of all the difficulty he faced as he tried to deliver his message to the people.

Lessons Learned

- Even single mothers can raise boys that become strong men.
- During the darkest of days, the loss of those closest to us can be at ease by relying on Allah's mercy on them and us.
- Everyone can make a difference by their actions and by the actions of the ones they affect during their lifetime. Either way, one can leave a strong legacy.

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