

## **Mother Mary, The Devout (peace be upon her): Seeking Common Ground**

God Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

**“And when the angels said, 'O Mary; verily Allah has chosen you and purified you well, and today has chosen you from amongst the women of all the worlds'.”** [The Holy Quran, 3:42]

It is reported in the authentic Islamic Hadeeth<sup>1</sup> Text, Al-Bukhari<sup>2</sup>:

Hazrat Aysha<sup>3</sup> (may Allah be well pleased with her) asked Hazrat Syeda Fatima<sup>4</sup> (may Allah be well pleased with her): ‘Did I see [you truly] when you leaned over the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and cried; then you leaned over him and you laughed?’ She said: ‘He (peace be upon him) informed me that he would die from his illness, so I cried; then he (peace be upon him) informed me that I would precede the other members of his family in being reunited with him, and he said, **“You are the chief lady [sayyida] of Paradise, with the exception of Mary the daughter of Imran.”**’

It is also stated by Imam Tabarani<sup>5</sup> (may Allah have mercy on him) that the Messenger of God, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: **“God married me in Paradise to Mary the daughter of Imran ...”**

Such is the high status of the lady who is considered one of the four perfect women in Islam, the other three being Hazrat Syeda Fatima (may Allah be well pleased with her), Hazrat Syeda Khadija<sup>6</sup> (may Allah be well pleased with her), and Hazrat Asiya<sup>7</sup> (may Allah have mercy on her). In classical Islamic literature the Blessed Mother Mary (peace be upon her) is honored with the title of *Al-batul*, a title she shares with the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Hazrat Syeda Fatima (may Allah be well pleased with her). *Al-batul* is derived from Arabic which holds the meaning of ‘severance’. The original meaning of the word is a palm shoot which has separated itself from its mother tree. This meaning applies to the being of Mother Mary (peace be upon her) because she severed herself from all worldly

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<sup>1</sup> The words, actions, and states of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family and companions) which forms the body of Islamic literature that complements the Holy Quran in the deduction of Islamic law

<sup>2</sup> One of the 6 most authoritative texts of Hadeeth

<sup>3</sup> The youngest wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family and companions)

<sup>4</sup> The youngest daughter of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family and companions)

<sup>5</sup> Another important Hadeeth collector of the 10<sup>th</sup> CE from Central Asia

<sup>6</sup> The first wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family and companions)

<sup>7</sup> The wife of the Pharaoh who cried out to God seeking protection against the Pharaoh’s tyranny and hence has become the symbol of Divine help for oppressed and abused women

desires and connections to devote herself completely to the worship of her Lord. She is also referred to in the Holy Quran as *Siddiqa*:

**“...And his mother is a truthful woman...”** [The Holy Quran, 5:75]

The author of the great Quranic exegesis, Tafseer Tabari<sup>8</sup> (may Allah have mercy on him) states that morphologically *siddiq* refers to one given to extreme sincerity of faith.

As women today, we need role models who can inspire our lives towards enrichment and peace. We need examples of women who put worship of God Almighty above everything, who spoke the truth at all times, were steadfast during trying times, who doted on their children, exhibited exemplary strength of character, were extremely sincere in their faith, and were profound signs of purity.

Mother Mary (peace be upon her) is perhaps the most powerful symbol of modesty and purity that the annals of history has produced. However it is interesting to note that when a Muslim woman in the modern world chooses to don the exact same attire of modesty, i.e. the *hijab*, she is scorned upon and pitied as a victim of oppression and deprived human rights. However no picture of Mother Mary (peace be upon her) is found without this very same appearance. Modesty is a timeless value that every religion promotes. However, unfortunately it has become a symbol of backwardness, timidity, and subservience to man. Nothing is further from the truth. When a Muslim woman today chooses to cover her hair and wear modest clothing, she is adhering to the exact same value of modesty that Mother Mary (peace be upon her) promoted with her clothing style. It is important to understand that we are all creatures of the same God Almighty, and these Divine values have been sent to humanity through different religions over time. We share more values across religions than we do differences.

Mother Mary (peace be upon her) was the daughter of Hazrat Imran (may Allah have mercy on him), from the line of Prophet David (peace be upon him). She was the answer to her mother Hazrat Hanna's (may Allah have mercy on her) prayer:

**“When the wife of Imran said, My lord! 'I make a vow to You, for what is in my womb to remain purely in Your service. Therefore accept this from me, no doubt, You alone are Hearing, Knowing.”** [The Holy Quran, 3:35]

Mother Mary's (peace be upon her) birth in itself was miraculous, since Hanna was barren, post-menopause and had no children. However when God has things Planned, nature falls into place regardless of seeming impossibilities. Ibn Ishaq (may Allah have mercy on him) relates that Hanna prayed to become pregnant with a male child, and then vowed that the child would

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<sup>8</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> CE Holy Quran exegete from Baghdad, Iraq

be dedicated to the service of God at Jerusalem (*Bayt-ul-Maqdis*). Little did she know the surprise awaiting her that her commitment to God would be fulfilled by the 'weaker' gender letting the world know that service, worship, obedience, devotion, and commitment to one's Creator is not a male privilege. Mother Mary (peace be upon her) lost her father before her blessed birth.

In line with her name, Mother Mary / Maryam (peace be upon her) which means "one who worships" in Aramaic, "and one who serves" in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, spent her youth in focused prayer to the point that her ankles became swollen. She prayed intensely in her prayer niche (*mihrab*) constructed by her spiritual guardian Hazrat Zachariah (peace be upon him) until perspiration poured from her feet. After receiving the Divine command to obedience she stood in prayer until her feet hurt, flowed with blood and festered. She was commanded to "*uqnuti*" which is a commanding verb related to *Al-qunut*, another attribute she is lauded with in the Holy Quran:

**"O Mary! Stand before your Lord humbly and prostrate for Him and bow down with those who bow down."** [The Holy Quran, 3:43]

Ibn Kathir<sup>9</sup> (may Allah have mercy on him) explains that *al-qunut* means humble, pious obedience to God, and surrender to His Will. It is reported that she performed the major ablution (*ghusl*) every night.

Mother Mary's (peace be upon her) devotion to her Lord was graced with tender, loving signs from her Lord of the fruits of summer in winter and fruits of winter in summer that amazed the people around her. As God Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

**"Therefore her Lord accepted her graciously and caused her to grow an excellent growth and gave her under the guardianship of 'Zakaria'. Whenever Zakaria went to her place of prayer, he found new provision with her. He said! O Mary! Whence came this to you? She spoke, 'that is from Allah,' No doubt, Allah gives whomsoever He pleases without measure."**

[The Holy Quran, 3:37]

Mother Mary (peace be upon her) continued her life of worship and prayer and when the time came for her destiny to unfold, she accepted the honor along with its perilous circumstances as does a lamb of her Lord. For a young woman who had never desired or seen male company was suddenly to become the mother of a Prophet of God (peace be upon him). When the Archangel Gabriel (peace be upon him) informed her of this great happening, she accepted it as is the nature of a believing woman who has submitted her entire being to the Will of God. There is nothing more painful in the realms of trials than shame that comes with false accusations.

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<sup>9</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> CE commentator of the Holy Quran from Syria

However God Almighty never forsakes those who are devoted to Him. He commanded her to silence and her newborn babe exonerated her.

Islamic literature is fraught with accounts of Mother Mary's (peace be upon her) spiritual grandeur, not the least of which is attributed to the great night of the Ascension (*Isra wal Miraj*) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is related that when the Noble Messenger (peace be upon him) appeared at the Noble Sanctuary of the *Bayt-ul-Maqdis* on the night of the *Isra*, two radiant lights were shining, one to the right of the mosque and one to the left, so he (peace be upon him) asked, '**O Gabriel! What are those two lights?**' And he replied, "The one on your right is the *mihrab* of your brother David (peace be upon him), and the one on your left is the grave of your sister Mary (peace be upon her)."

There are differences of opinion about where Mother Mary (peace be upon her) rests, however the great 16<sup>th</sup> CE traditional Islamic scholar and Quran exegete, Imam Suyuti (may Allah have mercy on him) states that she is buried in the Gethsemane (*Jasmaniyya*) church in the eastern district of Jerusalem near the foot of the Mount of the Olives (*Jabal-uz-Zaytun*). May she rest in peace. In the Muslim belief when a great Saint of God passes away, their resting place becomes a source of blessings. Imam Suyuti (may God have mercy on him) says that supplication near her resting place is highly recommended, and that it is desirable to recite Chapter Maryam of the Holy Quran and perform the *sajda* (prostration to God) and perform voluntary prayer at this site.

If there was ever a time when the world needed fertile ground to unite around commonalities, that time is now. And what greater common bond could there be than the love we all share for our great Mother Mary (peace be upon her)? Her example of Divine devotion, motherhood, piety, and spiritual excellence is a guiding light not just for women, but for men, and not just of any particular faith group but across the great monotheistic religions.

Her own miraculous birth, extreme devotion to her Lord from childhood, her being chosen as the receptacle of the immaculate conception of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and the trials it surrounded, her highest position in heaven amongst women, are all inspirations for women today to seek solace in worship, trust, perseverance, patience, and devotion.

We end with the following prayer:

*Our Lady of the Mihrab!  
We seek your downpour of grace  
Times have confused our road map  
Help us put things in place  
Show us how you worshipped with no distraction  
And stood firm when the world hurled accusation  
How you raised your babe (peace be upon him) with dedication*

*And persevered in constant supplication  
Grant us a drop of your devotion  
Ameen!*

Sources:

1. Holy Quran translations taken from <http://www.iecrcna.org/english.php>
2. Hadeeth text and references taken from Dr. Aliah Schleifer's Mary The Blessed Virgin of Islam. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 1997.

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