

Fast 11: Women in Islam — 4: Spiritual position

- The highest spiritual status that a person can have, according to the Quran, is to be a recipient of the word of God. The Quran gives examples of women also, not only men, who received the word of God. And these examples are from among the Jews:

“And We revealed to Moses’ mother, saying: Suckle him; then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear, nor grieve; surely We shall bring him back to you and make him a messenger (of Ours).” (28:7)

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ
فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي
وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۗ إِنَّا رَأَدُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ
الرُّسُلِينَ ﴿٧﴾

“When We revealed to your mother (O Moses) what was revealed: Put him into a chest, then put it into the river, the river will cast it upon the shore — there an enemy to Me and an enemy to him shall take him up.” (20:38–39)

إِذْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ مَا يُوحَىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾
أَنْ أَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ فَأَقْدِفِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ
فَلْيَلْقَاهُ أَلِيمٌ ۗ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ لِّيَ
وَعَدُوٌّ لَّهُ ﴿٣٩﴾

It is stated here that Allah sent revelation (*wahy*) to the mother of Moses with specific commands to obey, while she was not, of course, a commissioned prophet.

- Regarding Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was also, of course, from among the Israelites (i.e., Jews), the Quran says:

“And when the angels said: O Mary, surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world. O Mary, be obedient to your Lord and humble (or prostrate) yourself and bow down with those who bow.” (3:42–43)

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ
وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾
يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ
الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Here the status of Mary is revealed to her through the angels. Then some commands are addressed to her, which have also been addressed elsewhere to Muslims as in: “O you who believe, bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord, and do good that you may succeed” (22:77).

- She was also given the news from Allah, through the angels, of the birth of Jesus:

“When the angels said: O Mary, surely Allah gives you good news with a word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, worthy of regard in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those who are drawn near (to Allah)”. (3:45)

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ
بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ ۖ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ
مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ
الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

- Not only are Muslims required to believe in all the prophets, but they are also taught in the above verses that the mothers of two of the greatest prophets, Moses and Jesus, were themselves recipients of revelation from God. Moses’ mother and Mary are women from the Bible, and Muslims accord them the highest status. (I am deeply sorry to say that I have met Muslims who feel uncomfortable about this. Perhaps they want Allah to reflect their narrow-mindedness and bigotry!)
- In the life of our Holy Prophet Muhammad too, two women played a prominent role: his first wife *Hazrat Khadijah* and later *Hazrat Aishah*. When he received his first revelation, *Hazrat Khadijah* had the deep insight to realize that it was a high spiritual experience. The Holy Prophet returned home in a state of great anxiety and said to *Khadijah*: “I fear for myself”. She replied: “No, By Allah! Allah will never bring you to disgrace, for you unite the ties of relationship and bear the burden of the weak and earn for the destitute and honour the guest and help in real distress.” She then had the wisdom to take him to her cousin *Waraqah*, who also realized that this experience was revelation from God. In the following ten years she was a source of indispensable support and strength in the early part of his mission.
- *Khadijah* was the Holy Prophet’s connection with the past times, before he became a Prophet. His wife *Aishah* was his connection with the future world, and how Islam would be propagated to the later generations of Muslims. She carried forward and interpreted his teachings for those who had less opportunity or no opportunity to learn from the Holy Prophet, and even for his great Companions. A Companion related:

“Whenever there was any hadith that was difficult (to understand) for us, i.e., the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, and we asked *Aishah*, we always found that she had knowledge about that hadith.” (Tirmidhi, book 49, h. 4257)

مَا أَشْكَلَ عَلَيْنَا أَصْحَابَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ حَدِيثٌ قَطُّ فَسَأَلْنَا
عَائِشَةَ إِلَّا وَجَدْنَا عِنْدَهَا مِنْهُ عِلْمًا