

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

Living Quran

Session 10 - Wife 9

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Recap

We are still reflecting on Hadith Umm Zar', which is a very useful hadith, and we are trying to connect this to our own reality. So last time we finished Wife 8, who gave a very romantic description of her husband – his generosity, his fragrance, his beauty, and the way he looks after himself. And we elaborated more on beautification and its limits and etiquettes. We talked about what is and isn't allowed regarding plastic surgery, botox, and so on.

Today inshallah we'll cover Wife 9. She says:

'My husband is the master of a lofty building. He is a tall, generous man, wearing a long strap for carrying his sword. His ashes are abundant, and his house is near people so they can easily consult him.'

Again, less than two lines, but she is describing something very important. If we were to give this testimony a title, she's describing the leader of the tribe. And this is so important to understand, in the context of the story. What she's narrating here, is not personal. She doesn't mention anything about how he treats her, the way he talks to her, nothing. Everything she describes is related to how her husband is with people, with the community, with the problems of the tribe. She talks about his appearance, his house, his generosity – no mention, in any form, of his relationship with her.

Husband with high status

She starts by saying, 'my husband is the master of a lofty building'. What does that mean? Commentators have looked at this statement from both a metaphorical point of view and a literal one. Metaphorically, which is more likely the case, she is saying that her husband is descended from a very honoured and respected family. He has a high status in the community. Also, it means he's very famous. When you have a very tall building, you can see it from anywhere in the city; it's famous. Everyone talks about it; everyone is familiar with it. Hence she's comparing her husband to this. And this is part and parcel of being the leader of the community – usually, the leader has a big house.

The home which opens its doors to the community

Often leaders built their home in a place where everyone could see, such as on top of a hill. Then it can be seen from a distance, and people would come and seek hospitality. This is again part of the context, as in many places in the Arab world this is still the case. He has a big house with tall pillars; it's very spacious and can accommodate many people. So metaphorically she is talking about his family, and literally she is describing his real house. And people who have needs and issues can come and consult him.

What is important to Wife 9

As we've done in previous sessions, let's think about why she put this first? Usually the most annoying thing goes first, or the best thing. Here, she's talking about his status and fame. That's the most exciting thing to her. Perhaps she's not from that community; perhaps she's amazed and mesmerised by what she has experienced. We can't see any complaints, only that she's very proud of her husband.

Husband's stature – physically and metaphorically

The second thing Wife 9 mentions is the strap of his sword. If he's a tall man, he must have a long strap. So instead of saying he's a tall man with a large sword, she's using a metaphor and saying the strap that he uses to carry his sword is so long! Which means, he's a very big man; he's scary. Which is good: to be more respected at that time you had to have these characteristics, to be at the forefront of battle and so on. And not only is he a very tall man, but he must carry a large sword, which means he's brave. He doesn't just sit at home and hide from fighting his enemies. He's a brave, courageous person, and this is another thing to be proud of. The meaning of this statement could also be that his control is vast; she's using this to say that he doesn't just control his tribe and his own area, his influence is beyond just his place. So again she's proud of her husband; he's not just a community leader, he's beyond that, perhaps he leads many tribes.

Generous hospitality

And then she mentions something else. 'His ashes are abundant.' Another metaphor. What are the ashes here? The ashes are the last thing in the chain: burnt wood turns to embers, and then to ashes. And why do we burn this wood? For cooking. Why do we cook? For guests. If you have many guests you need plenty of food, and you will have ashes in abundance. She's saying that he's always hospitable, he has lots of people coming and going. He's always busy receiving people, feeding his guests and being generous. This is one of the things to be praised, in a leader or anyone, that they are generous to their guests. It's something we would like to emulate. So he's a generous person, and a wealthy person. They have plenty of cattle and camels and sheep, you name it. They live in a desert: they can't feed people from crops. What they usually had was only meat and milk, and dates. So though they are limited in their resources, they are still hospitable.

Opportunistic hosts

When it's election time, we see many leaders going into their communities and sitting with the people, many of them will host dinners and give out food. The difference is that some people are genuine, and some are opportunistic, just looking to get what they want. Here, she's saying no, he's a good person of service, he has a big heart and he listens and advises his people. You can see that he's a person of good qualities, and of course this is why she's not complaining about anything.

Accessible and wise

His house is also near the people who would consult him. He's not isolating himself; he's not hidden behind gates. His house is in the midst of the people – anyone who wants to come to him can easily access him, anyone can talk to him. This is another important feature. The Prophet (peace be upon him) also used to be like that. Anyone who knocked on his door was welcome in his house, to talk to him and ask him questions and easily discuss their issues. So she's talking about a humble person – although he's the leader he's still humble and available, and in order to be in such a position he must have wisdom too. Otherwise people would not come back to him, and he would have a bad reputation for foolishness and stupidity. Instead, he's a wise person, someone of understanding and with a big heart. He is a person of genuine service to his community, and he looks after them.

Some leaders choose to go underground and be unseen. This man isn't like that: he's in the middle of the community and anyone who wants to talk to him can do so. In another narration we also have the addition, 'He will not eat fully when he has guests, and he does not sleep when his guests are afraid.' So when he has guests, he will not eat until he is full. He wants his guests to eat fully and be satisfied, so he will postpone a full meal. He will share some food with them, but he won't gorge

himself. And if he has guests, he will stay up guarding them to give them safety and security while they are under his protection. And again it shows us how genuine and how brave he is that he looks after his guests and his community.

Abundant ashes

Talking again about the ashes, a very common tradition in the Arab world is that they used to start a fire from the top of a hill near their house during the night, just to inform anyone passing by that they were there, in case they needed any food or hospitality. Many of the stories in Arabic literature feature this. So he is also one of these people, they keep their fire going day and night, and here is another reason why his ashes are in abundance.

Being proud of her husband

Going back to her description, as we mentioned earlier, she's not complaining. She's proud of her husband and satisfied with his character because he's a generous person. He is a person with a big heart, and he's brave and genuine, and serves his community. He mixes with his people and listens to them. And if he listens to his people and advises them, more than likely he also listens to his wife and has a big heart and is kind and generous towards her too. He looks after his community, and most likely he looks after her too. This is why she didn't say a single word of complaint against him. In fact, she's praising him. She's overwhelmed by her husband and by what she has, and she's sharing with her friends what she's proud of, not anything that she's annoyed by.

The supportive wife

We can try to guess if there's anything to be cross about: maybe she doesn't see her husband often because he's always out in the community, or in the evenings he's entertaining his guests. We don't know if this is the case, but if it is then she hasn't mentioned it, so she's fine with it – she's satisfied, and she's there to support and help him. It seems as well that she must be an easy-going person, not fussy; she doesn't magnify his mistakes.

Be tolerant of mistakes

Definitely he must have some shortcomings and he must make mistakes, but nevertheless she doesn't make a big deal out of them. And this is so important in the relationship between husband and wife, not to be fussy. We came across this in some of the earlier descriptions, such as Wife 5, who says her husband doesn't ask about whatever is in the house. Being fussy creates problems, if someone is nitpicking and interfering with the other's business. The more time a couple is together, especially at weekends or when they're working from home, and so on, the more problems I have noticed that they tend to have. Don't interfere in what is not yours.

Have tact

You can give your opinion, without mocking or controlling your partner, but don't impose it on your partner. Only if they're overstepping the limits and doing something *haram*, tell them 'no', but even then, you should do it nicely and wisely. And it is not just what you say, but how you say it. We are all humans with feelings, and we should treat others as we want to be treated. If you want your partner to speak nicely to you and not to criticise you, you need to speak nicely to them and not criticise them. And choose the right time, too. You need to choose the right time, and the right words, and have the right intention. Inshallah if you have these three things, things will be accommodated and embraced in a good way. Otherwise, you have a recipe for disaster.

Believe in your spouse and give them confidence

Wife 9 describes her husband as a nice, generous person and a leader in the community. And as the wife of such a leader, she respects and supports him, and this is important too. Some people don't believe in their partner's abilities. If people believe in him, she shouldn't knock his confidence or try to destroy what he has built outside. If she has an issue, she should sit down and talk to him, but she shouldn't expose him or try to ruin his life. And it's not that she should support him through everything; if he's doing something *haram* of course she should try to stop him, but for both partners – if the other is doing something good, then be behind them and support them; give them what they need and don't be jealous of them.

We need to help each other to grow and be better leaders and spouses, and let's have a big heart and forgive each other if they have done something wrong. It's a very beautiful description from Wife 9, and this section is about leadership and how you should deal with and support a community leader. Don't destroy his stability or his tranquillity which he needs. If he's not satisfied inside, then he will fail outside. So whether he or she is the leader let's support each other and make it tranquil and peaceful.