

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

Living Quran – 25.6.19

Taught by Shaykh Haytham Tamim

Transcribed by Ayesha Khan

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Introduction

Hadith Umm Zar' is part of Tirmidhi's *Shama'il Muhammadiyyah* one of the most extensive and celebrated works on the description and attributes of the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him), comprising 415 narrations of which the hadith Umm Zar' comes towards the end.

It is a very famous hadith called Umm Zar' after one of the speakers in the hadith and it has also narrated by Imam Muslim and Imam Bukhari, as well as Nasai.

Imam Tirmidhi narrated this hadith under the topic known as '*fi kalamī rasulillāhi fī al samar*' – *samar* means the time after the *isha* prayer. During the evening, people would stay to entertain each other after the *salah* to discuss matters and generally relax, just as we relax and have coffee with our spouses or friends today.

Is it permissible to stay and chat after *isha* or not?

It is a matter of debate among scholars whether it is or is not allowed to stay awake after *isha*, rather than going to sleep immediately to catch the *fajr* prayer.

What is the hadith about?

This hadith is the tale of 11 women who come together to gossip about their husbands with brutal honesty.

Umm Zar' is the name of one of ladies in the hadith, who speaks last and delivers the core message of the hadith.

Importance of the hadith

Due to its importance, there are many commentaries on this hadith, including one by Qadi Iyad, (who passed away 544 AH), who is well known for his beautiful work on the Sunnah, especially his *Kitab al Shifa bi Tarif Huquq al Mustafa*, (The Book of Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of or News of the Chosen One) which is highly recommended. It is available in English and has an excellent translation by Aisha Bewley.

Imam Rifa'i, the great Shafi'i scholar of the 6th century, (who died 623 AH) well known as al Hujat al Islam, commented on this hadith in a *risala* (short booklet) called *Durrat al Dar Hadithi Umami Zar'*. (Abu Aliyah one of our Utrujj teachers wrote a very good translation of this).

Imam Suyuti, (who passed away in 911 AH), a scholar who was very well known for his exemplary character and work, summarised *Shama'il Muhammadiya* in a booklet called *Zahrul Khama'il ala Shama'il*, which we delivered in the Men's Monday class.

Ibn Hajar Asqalani in *Fath al Bari*, Imam Nawani in his 9- volume commentary on Sahih Muslim also commented on this hadith.

This shows the value of this hadith.

The appeal of this story

When I delivered Imam Suyuti's summary of *Shama'il*, I was uncertain how it would be received. The language is archaic and hard to understand. When you read it, you need a dictionary to understand it, and a dictionary to understand that dictionary, as it is so complex. I did not think the students I was teaching would understand it, or even had the appetite for it. They were not dedicated knowledge seekers, but bankers and lawyers who were not looking for something erudite, so I was going to skip it. Then one night I thought I would read a bit from it after all. To my surprise, when I started reading it I could see the excitement in their faces, the scenarios resonated with them and I realised how entertaining it was for them, and within not time the attendance of the class increased and became very popular.

Context of the hadith

One night, the Prophet (peace be on him) was sitting and chatting with Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) after *isha*, and he asked her if she knew the story of Umm Zar'. In another narration it was Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) who told him the story. Either way, the Prophet (peace be on him) was engaged in conversation with her which is a beautiful reflection of the relationship between husband wife from the Sunnah.

Enjoying the company of your spouse

Chatting with one's spouse is a rewarding act – to entertain your spouse in a *halal* way and environment is creditable.

Allah Almighty destined for both of you to live together so creating time for each other as partners and friends is positive, and as always, the Prophet (peace be on him) was the perfect role model, and he took the time to exchange stories with Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) in a *halal* way.

Are these stories backbiting?

Though the women themselves are backbiting - 7 out of the 11 are criticising their husbands, and 4 or 5 (depending how you count it), including Umm Zar' herself are praising their husbands - the hadith is not classed as backbiting, as it is a story.

This story is classified as hadith because the Prophet (peace be on him) either narrated the story or listened to it and by doing so, approved it.

By listening to the story, however, the Prophet (peace be on him) did not give his approval of backbiting. Backbiting is forbidden whether one is relaying it to their spouse, or listening to their spouse backbiting.

The benefits of stories

This was a famous story and as there was no television, or Wi Fi, entertainment was through story-telling. We all have fond memories of our grannies telling us stories. Allah Almighty has also told us stories in the Quran. We, as humans, love listening to stories, so Allah Almighty says He is telling us *qasas*, (stories) and even named a Surah Al *Qasas* (stories). When we hear a story, we are always interested to know what is coming next, and it elicits our attention whenever someone says, 'I want to tell you a story'. In the Quran, the stories are not just told for entertainment value, and to keep us engaged, but for the valuable lessons in them.

Wisdom and experience is passed down generations through stories. There is much wealth in them. And similarly, bedtime stories build blocks in the heart and minds of our children.

The background of this story

This story took place a long time ago, in Yemen. Yemen borders Saudi Arabi and has been very closely intermixed with it from the beginning. Allah Almighty was referring to Yemen when He said in Surah Quraysh: *rihlat ashita wa saif*, 'the journey of winter and the summer'. The annual winter journey was to Yemen, where the Quraysh took their caravans. And in Summer, they took them to Sham, (or the Levant), which comprises Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

The protagonists of the story

There women in this story are unnamed, although there are some narrations in which they have been named. However it is not important to know their names, what is important is what they say, as each one summarises her relationship with her husband.

Relevance today

When you analyse the hadith there are many lessons in it. It touches on many social issues which have not changed. I was shocked that though this story took place even before 1400 years ago when it was told, the issues it depicts are no different in our community today.

We see the tension between culture and principles, the taboo of divorce, which are still the same.

Analysing both sides of a story

Though the story is told from the point of view of the women, I have not just taken their analysis of their husbands but looked at how their words reflect their personalities and concerns. I have tried to see the other side of the story. We should never judge a story from one side alone, as their account is invariably biased.

In the story of Dawood (peace be on him), he was told by a man that his brother who owned 99 goats had oppressed him, by taking his only goat. Based on his words, Dawood (peace be on him) delivered judgment that his brother was in the wrong. However, the Quran told us that he had jumped to a conclusion based on one version of the situation. He had not heard the other side, which painted a very different picture. The complainant had not been looking after his goat properly, whereas his brother had been looking after his goats, and wanted to prevent his brother from abusing his lone goat. So we learn from this not to jump to conclusions.

Whenever I hear the version of a story from one side, I automatically feel sympathy for the person telling it, but from my experience, when I hear the other side, I realise that the person left out many important details which would reflect badly on them. It is human nature to omit relaying our wrong doings, and to conceal our faults as much as possible.

Through this course, by considering the story from both sides, you will become trained as a fairer listener and learn not to jump to conclusions.

The role of emotions in clouding judgement

Often our judgement is clouded by emotion. When we hear the story from these women, we will see that at times they only see the glass half empty. It is natural to taint our judgment with our feelings. In particular this is a dangerous trait when we are angry but shoot off decisions in the heat of the moment, which prove to be ill-judged. Sometimes it takes a few days to calm down and see a situation clearly. If we are controlled by our anger, we are liable to make the wrong decision. I know many people who deeply regret decisions they took in this emotional state.

Beginning of hadith

11 women came together and promised they would not hold back anything about the state of their husbands. It appears to be a regular moaning session over a cup of tea. They must have been meeting up regularly, as they are familiar with each other. It is not common to bare the details of your private life to strangers. Although there is the odd exception to this, the kind of person who can't help but pour out all the details of their private life to anyone they meet, it is not normal.

My analysis is that these women had agreed to discuss their husbands, and though in every meeting you have someone who steers it, it is not clear in this story who is chairing the discussion, nor is it mentioned whose house they were at.

Gender differences

Through this story we will come to see the basics in any marriage. And also, we will notice that men and women are wired differently and communicate differently. On the whole, men tend to speak their minds. While at times, women say one thing when they mean something else. Men need to learn how to understand them.