

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

Living Quran

Session 15

Why Abu Zar left his wife

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Maid and Nannies - khalwa and parenting responsibility

Last session we talked about maids, nannies and babysitters and the significance of treating them with fairness, justice and respect. And the importance, at the same time of being careful of allowing someone in the house, especially when wives and children are not there. Husbands and maids should not be left alone in a secluded space, as this is haram. If this situation arises, the maid should retreat to her room, or isolate herself so she is not in the vicinity of the husband. It is better not to get into a position where they are left alone together at home. It is preferable in such a scenario if the maid comes in to work for a few hours and then leaves, or if there are others present in the house then there is no problem.

I can tell you from many stories that I came across there are issues when the maid sleeps at home, and sometimes the maid and husband develop a relationship. All the scenarios are not bad, but we need to be very careful.

Sometimes when a maid is maltreated, she retaliates and treats the children badly. In some cases she may even poison or hit them. Please be very careful. Parents have the responsibility of caring for their children. We do in some scenarios need help at home, but maids and nannies are not supposed to be a substitute for their parents.

The eleventh one said: My husband is Abu Zar'. How fine Abu Zar' is! He has suspended in my ears heavy ornaments and (fed me liberally) that my sinews and bones are covered with fat. So he made me happy. He found me among the shepherds living in the side of the mountain, and he made me the owner of the horses, camels and lands and heaps of grain and he finds no fault with me. I sleep and get up in the morning (at my own sweet will) and drink to my heart's content. The mother of Abu Zar', how fine is the mother of Abu Zar'! Her bundles are heavily packed (or receptacles in her house are filled to the brim) and the house quite spacious. So far as the son of Abu Zar' is concerned, his bed is as soft as a green palm-stick drawn forth from its bark, or like a sword drawn forth from its scabbard, and whom just an arm of a lamb is enough to satiate. So far as the daughter of Abu Zar' is concerned, how fine is the daughter of Abu Zar', obedient to her father, obedient to her mother, wearing sufficient flesh and a source of jealousy for her co-wife. As for the slave-girl of Abu Zar', how fine is she; she does not disclose our affairs to others (outside the four walls of the house). She does not remove our wheat, or provision, or take it forth, or squander it, but she preserves it faithfully (as a sacred trust). And she does not let the house fill with rubbish.

One day Abu Zar' went out (of his house) when the milk was churned in the vessels, that he met a woman, having two children like leopards playing with her pomegranates (chest) under her vest. He divorced me (Umm Zar') and married that woman (whom Abu Zar') met on the way. I (Umm Zar') later on married another person, a chief, who was an expert rider, and a fine archer: he bestowed upon me many gifts and gave me one pair of every kind of animal and said: Umm Zar', make use of everything (you need) and send forth to your parents (but the fact) is that even if I combine all the gifts that he bestowed upon me, they stand no comparison to the least gift of Abu Zar'.

Aisha reported that Allah's Messenger (peace be on him) said to me: I am for you as Abu Zar' was for Umm Zar'.

Aisha commented you are better than Abu Zar to me that Abu Zar and the Prophet (peace be on him) said in another version, he divorced her and I will not divorce you.

Why did Abu Zar leave his wife?

Umm Zar described the luxury she lived in with Abu Zar; she had many cooks and servants and lived like a princess. One spring day, Abu Zar went out, the grass was in abundance, the cattle were out and there was plenty of milk, which was being churned to make butter.

It was a good day because it was spring, but for Umm Zar it was the worst day. The description of Umm Zar describes the scene as Abu Zar left the house. Perhaps he went to get some fresh air, although he was wealthy he might have been going to see his cattle. On that journey he saw a woman, with two young children, playing.

The description of these two children as leopards suggests that they had energy, strength and beauty. They could have been described as sheep or some other creature, but a leopard is replete with good looks and vitality, which are two desirable features. Abu Zar already had children and a well established family but he came across these two children and a beautiful woman. Umm Zar does not comment on the woman or her beauty. This is a sensitive issue for her. She didn't spell out that the woman was more attractive or younger than her, but we can guess this from the description of her children, who most probably reflect their mother's beauty.

The description of her breasts as pomegranates point to the fact that she was young, not old. This is probably one of the reasons Abu Zar would want to marry her. There is no mention of her own husband. It is not clear whether she is a young widow or divorcee, but she was definitely a single mother.

In some narrations it says this woman she was lying on the floor, perhaps tired from churning the milk in the containers to make butter. And when he saw her, he was immediately attracted to her, her beauty, her age and her children who were attractive and healthy. He must have wanted children who were similar. Bowled over by this woman, Abu Zar married her.

Pre Islamic reproductive practices

The culture at that time, before Islam, was different and it was not uncommon for marriages to be made for a particular feature such as beauty. And there was a well known form of marriage or nikkah, called *nikkah al istibda'*, where a man wanting to have a child with the same features as a warrior or a knight or strong wrestler he knew would send his wife to sleep with him to have those features and DNA in his tribe. She would return pregnant and give birth and the child would grow up to be a warrior who would defend the tribe. This was not that commonly practiced, but it existed and Arabs were familiar with this.

Why not stay married to Umm Zar?

I know some of you are wondering why Abu Zar divorced Umm Zar after marrying his new wife when he could have been married to both. There are mainly two reasons. We know polygamy existed and even that the daughter of Abu Zar was a second wife. It was not an alien concept to them. Why didn't Abu Zar keep his wife? The first reason is mentioned in some narrations that his new wife insisted he divorce

Umm Zar. Madly in love with her, probably he couldn't resist her beauty and acquiesced, which was the wrong decision to make. This is the sad part of the story. All that goodness that Abu Zar had been credited for collapses with his lack of loyalty.

Inciting a man or woman to divorce is haram

If someone marries a second wife and she insists he divorces his previous wife, this is not allowed. In the hadith, narrated in Bukhari no one should demand the hand of a girl who is engaged to someone else. He is not allowed to seek her hand in khitbah. Narrated Abu Huraira:

Allah's Messenger (peace be on him) forbade a man to propose to a girl who has already been engaged to someone else; and a woman should not try to cause some other woman to be divorced in order to take her place. (Bukhari)

The Prophet (peace be on him) also forbade a woman to ask a man to divorce his previous wife. Narrated Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (peace be on him) said:

The Prophet (peace be on him) said: Anyone who incites a woman against her husband or a slave against his master is not one of us. (Abu Dawoud)

It is very sinful. I came across this and it is absolutely haram and destroys two families. It is forbidden also for a man to ask a married woman to divorce her husband and marry him. Here the second wife asked Abu Zar to divorce his wife and he stupidly did this. Sinking in the beauty of the new wife he is disloyal to Umm Zar.

Childlessness

There second possibility why Abu Zar divorced his wife which I haven't read in any commentary anywhere. It is my gut feeling is that Umm Zar had no children. Then why was she known as 'Umm Zar'? The practice of having a kunya (nickname based on being called the Umm/mother of x, or Abu/father of y) was common among the Arabs, whether you had children or not. My shaykh used to call me Abu Ahmed long before I was married- I was just 20 at the time. So you can be called Abu or Umm even if you have no children. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was called Umm Abdillah, even though she had no children of her own. Her sister Hafsa had a son, Abdillah, and her fondness for him might be why she was called Umm Abdillah.

Umm Zar's childlessness is suggested by the fact Umm Zar described the children as the 'son of Abu Zar' rather than 'my son, and she said they were obedient to 'their parents', rather than 'obedient to us'. When she described Abu Zar's son she said that he didn't eat too much and didn't trouble her, that is not a natural way to talk about your own children. In Arabic we say, a mother would feed her son her heart. She never calls her children a burden, she enjoys them.

Similarly the description of the daughter of Abu Zar does not sound like a mother's relationship with her daughter which is very close. Therefore Abu Zar had no children from Umm Zar though she had beautiful features and good attributes which is why he married her in the first place.

We don't know how long they had been married, but it was probably a long time. It is likely that Umm Zar does not spell it out the fact she had no children of her own as this was too bitter and embarrassing, but between the lines, we see that she described so many details like the maids and Abu Zar's children, his

mother but leaves out this fact because it is too painful to talk about. She can't have children but she understands that Abu Zar wants more children.

I shared this possible explanation of why Abu Zar left his wife with my teacher and he said yes it does sound like a strong possibility. This is one of the reasons people divorce. When a wife can't have children and the husband wants them.

The age difference between Abu Zar and his second wife. How did he have children in the first place? He probably divorced the previous wife and she is still alive. Because Umm Zar mentioned that the son and daughter were obedient to their parents – you wouldn't say they are obedient to their parents if only the father is alive. So she used to see them regularly and so Umm Zar described that they were obedient to their mother, as well as their father.

Nagging

In an additional narration, the new wife insisted and nagged her husband until he divorced Umm Zar. Nagging sometimes wears you down and can make you take the wrong decision. Abu Zar took the wrong decision because he was controlled by desire and by his emotions, and so gave into the nagging which was the wrong thing to do. If a decision is good take it, if it is bad, don't take it, regardless of nagging. Here Abu Zar responded to it.

The virtue of Umm Zar

In the midst of the pain which she is suffering, Umm Zar is still a reasonable person. She concedes, between the lines, that the other woman was young, attractive and had children, and that she couldn't compete with that. She is older and perhaps not so energetic, so she is being fair.

Some students suggested that Abu Zar saw the woman naked, but the words did not say that. Is it a possibility he saw her exposed? If I put it in a different context, if she was breast feeding it is a possibility he saw her semi naked, and it says in the narration the children were playing with two pomegranates – so it could be they were twins and she was feeding them and after they finished they were playing with their mum. Maybe this is what could be described. How did Umm Zar know this? She wasn't there at this time. Without doubt Abu Zar told her. And after an innocent description of what he had seen, said he wanted to marry her. So Umm Zar heard the story from her husband and most likely left out some details.

Instead of being grateful, the second wife was greedy and unfair and insisted on him divorcing Umm Zar. It is not a good thing. Narrated Abu Huraira:

Allah's Messenger (peace be on him) forbade a man to propose to a girl who has already been engaged to someone else; and a woman should not try to cause some other woman to be divorced in order to take her place. (Bukhari)

Remarriage of Umm Zar

Following her divorce, Umm Zar married a noble person. She is not an old lady, but still attractive and desirable. If she is old and ugly why would anyone marry her? But she is still a good looking lady and she married a man who had fast, tireless horses. He is a good person, from a good tribe, and wealthy, but not as rich as Abu Zar. However he is generous as she says he gave her every kind of livestock and told her to

feed her family. Yet despite that what he gave her, would not fill the smallest utensils of Abu Zar; he isn't a tenth of Abu Zar.

Umm Zar is still in love with Abu Zar. As we say in Arabic, 'Turn your heart to whichever lover you want, real love is only for your first love'. Abu Zar was her first love. She cannot get away from it. The Prophet (peace be on him) said 'I am to you, like Abu Zar', and Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said, 'No, you are much better to me.'

We ask Allah to give us good character and loyalty and not to be tempted by the dunya, and to be loyal to our families and our loved ones and our children. Ameen.