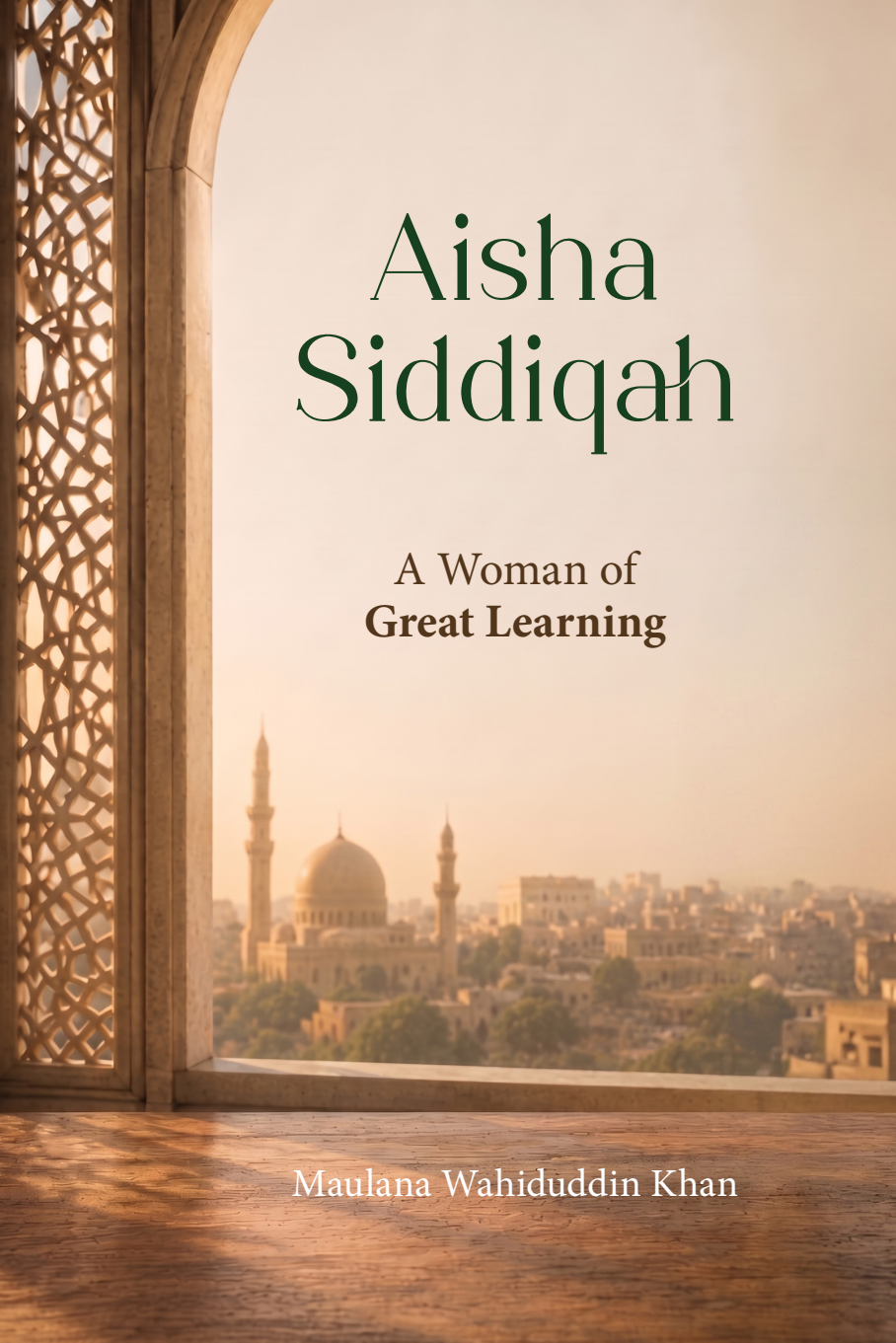




Aisha Siddiqah

A Woman of
Great Learning

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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CONTENTS

Aisha Siddiqah: An Extraordinary Woman	5
Understanding Aisha Siddiqah	10
Education and Personal Development	13
Formative Training Under the Prophet	17
The Principle of Gradual Reform	21
The Wisdom of Confidentiality	23
Aisha's Derivation of Islamic Rulings	25
Aisha's Observations on Hadith Reports	36
Clarifying Hadith Reports	38
Aisha's Marriage and her Historic Role	47
A Marriage in a Wider Perspective	58
The Wisdom Behind the Marriage	61
Lessons from Chapter 24, Al-Nur	65
Irreligious Conduct in the Name of Religion	74
An Exemplary Woman	78

AISHA SIDDIQAH

AN EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN

Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr Siddiq, the first Caliph of Islam. She was born in Makkah eight years before the Hijrah and passed away in 58 AH at the age of sixty-six.

Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, passed away about three years before the Hijrah. Sometime later, Khawlah bint Hakim, one of the early Companions, approached Abu Bakr on the Prophet's behalf with a marriage proposal for Aisha. Abu Bakr explained that Mut'im ibn Adi, chief of the Banu Nawfal clan of the Quraysh, had earlier proposed a marriage between Aisha and his son Jubayr, and that he had accepted the proposal. Abu Bakr was known for never going back on his word. As the report states: "By God, Abu Bakr never broke a promise." (*Dala'il al-Nubuwwah* by al-Bayhaqi, Vol. 2, p. 411)

Abu Bakr then went to Mut'im and asked whether he still wished his son to marry Aisha. Mut'im turned to his wife and asked for her opinion.

Addressing Abu Bakr, she said: “I fear that if my son marries into your family, he may become a *Sabi*’—that is, he may abandon the religion of his forefathers and enter your religion, Islam.”

Abu Bakr then asked Mut‘im directly, “What do you say?” Mut‘im replied, “You have heard what my wife has said.”

Thus, both Mut‘im and his wife withdrew from the proposed marriage. Abu Bakr then understood that he was no longer bound by his earlier commitment. He told Khawlah that he now agreed to Aisha’s marriage to the Prophet. At the appointed time, the Prophet Muhammad went to Abu Bakr’s house, where the marriage was solemnized. The dower was fixed at four hundred dirhams.

This incident teaches us that when an arrangement in social life falls through, one should not become disheartened. It is possible that something better may emerge from the situation. Aisha’s proposed marriage to the son of a leading figure in Makkah did not take place, but she later became the wife of the Prophet of Islam, the greatest figure in human history.

Aisha was considerably younger than the Prophet. As a result, she lived for nearly fifty years after his death. The wisdom behind this marriage, despite the significant difference in their ages, was that Aisha possessed exceptional intelligence and an extraordinary

ability to understand and retain knowledge. Through this marriage, her God-gifted abilities became a source of benefit for people throughout the world.

Aisha lived with the Prophet for nearly ten years. During this long period, she remained closely associated with him in every situation, by day and by night. She observed his life, listened carefully to his words, and understood the deeper meaning of his teachings. In this way, a vast treasure of religious knowledge and prophetic wisdom was preserved in her memory. After the Prophet's death, she passed this knowledge on to the Muslim community. For almost half a century, she remained a living source of the Prophet's teachings, enabling later generations to learn from his life and guidance.

Ibn Hajar al Asqalani records that Aisha was born approximately eight years before the Hijrah. She was about eighteen years old when the Prophet died and lived for nearly fifty years after him. She had memorized many of his teachings, and people acquired a great deal of knowledge from her. Numerous religious rulings and principles of conduct were also transmitted on her authority. It has even been said that one-fourth of the rulings of Islamic law were narrated through her. (*Fath al-Bari*, Vol. 7, p. 107) She passed away in 58 AH, during the caliphate of Muawiyah. (*Siyar A'lam al-Nubala* by al-Dhahabi, Vol. 2, p. 192)

Aisha did not narrate a very large number of the Prophet's sayings. Her distinctive contribution lay elsewhere: she listened to every word of the Prophet with deep attention, observed each of his actions closely, and then, with her God-gifted intelligence, understood the wisdom underlying them. Her statements are, therefore, a treasure-house of Islamic wisdom and spiritual insight. For example, she observed that whenever the Prophet had to choose between two courses of action, he invariably chose the easier one. This brief observation contains profound guidance for life.

Aisha devoted her exceptional intelligence entirely to the cause of God's religion. At the same time, she made simplicity and freedom from material attachment the guiding principles of her life. In her later years, considerable wealth came into her hands, but she distributed it among others and continued to lead a life of great simplicity.

Once, Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr sent Aisha 180,000 dirhams (silver coins). By evening, she had given away the entire amount in charity, although she was fasting that day and there was nothing in the house except bread and olive oil. Her maid remarked, "It would have been good to keep back a few dirhams to buy something for your fast-breaking meal." Aisha replied, "Had you reminded me

earlier, I would have done so.” (*Al-Zuhd* by Hannad ibn al-Sari, Report No. 619)

Zuhud (asceticism) is the gateway to wisdom. Whoever wants the fountain of divine knowledge and Islamic wisdom to flow in their mind must remain detached from material things in this world. (*Al-Risala*, March 1996)

UNDERSTANDING AISHA SIDDIQAH

Aisha bint Abi Bakr holds a unique and distinguished place in Islamic history as one of its foremost women. She was the daughter of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, and later became the esteemed wife of the Prophet of Islam. She was one of the leading scholars of the Quran, and in the field of Hadith she attained the status of a mujtahidah, a woman qualified for independent juristic reasoning.

Her father was Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah, and her mother was Umm Ruman bint Amir. She was born in Makkah in the fifth year of Prophethood. After examining various reports, Mawlana Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi concluded that her probable date of birth was Shawwal 9 BH, corresponding to July 614 CE. (*Sirat Aisha*, Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, p. 19)

Aisha had an extraordinary memory. She remembered many events even from her early childhood. She had memorized a large body of Arabic poetry and would often quote verses suited to different occasions. In the

thirteenth year of Prophethood, when the Prophet of Islam migrated from Makkah to Madinah with Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Aisha also migrated with her family. Along with her remarkable memory, she was exceptionally intelligent and perceptive. Though she was only eight years old at the time of the *Hijrah*, she remembered its events in great detail. No other Companion preserved such a continuous and detailed account of the *Hijrah* as she did.

The Prophet of Islam's first marriage was to Khadijah bint Khuwaylid in Makkah, when he was twenty-five years old. Khadijah passed away three years before the *Hijrah*. After her death, he married Aisha bint Abi Bakr. The proposal was conveyed through Khawlah bint Hakim. Hadith sources show that the marriage contract took place in Makkah when Aisha was six years old. Her formal departure to the Prophet's household took place in Madinah after the *Hijrah*, when she was nine years old. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 24867)

The marriage contract was conducted by her father, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. (*Al-Mustadrak al-Hakim*, Hadith No. 2704) According to the narrations, her mahr, a mandatory marriage gift, was five hundred dirhams. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1426)

In ancient Arabia, literacy was not common, and only a few people knew how to read and write. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq was among this small educated group. Because

of this family tradition, Aisha also had the opportunity to learn reading and writing. She would read the Quran from the written text, and according to some reports, she could also write. Thus, she was able to reply to letters in writing. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In accounts of Aisha al-Siddiqah's life, it is stated that she held a distinguished position among the Companions in terms of knowledge. She is described as the greatest jurist among Muslim women and the most learned among them in religion and literature: "the most juristically knowledgeable of Muslim women and the most learned among them in religion and literature." (*Al-A'lam*, al-Zirikli, Vol. 3, p. 240)

Another narration uses these words: "Aisha was the most juristically knowledgeable of people, the most learned of people, and the one with the soundest judgment in public affairs." (*Al-Mustadrak al-Hakim*, Hadith No. 6748)

Abu Musa al-Ash'ari said: "Whenever we, the Companions of the Messenger of God, faced difficulty in understanding any hadith and asked Aisha about it, we found that she possessed knowledge concerning it." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3883)

Such statements about Aisha al-Siddiqah's knowledge are found in the books of Hadith and Seerah. They point to

an important issue: the importance of women's education in Islam. Aisha did not possess this knowledge by birth, nor could she have done so. She undoubtedly acquired it within the Islamic society of her time.

Her father, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, was counted among the small number of people in ancient Arabia who knew how to read and write. Thus, Aisha's first educational institution was her own home. From her father, she listened to and memorized poetry rich in wisdom and the speeches of renowned Arab orators. She also learned genealogy from him, which was, in effect, a form of knowledge of Arab history.

After her marriage, when she came into the household of the Prophet of Islam, she had the opportunity to learn from a teacher such as the Prophet himself. This process continued every day in one form or another. Many examples of this circle of learning are found in the books of Hadith.

In addition, Aisha's residence, which consisted of a single room (*Hujrah*), adjoined the Prophet's Mosque as it stood at the time. From her *Hujrah*, she could listen to the Prophet's daily teaching sessions held in the mosque.

There was no fixed time for learning religious knowledge. Aisha had the companionship of the Prophet day and night. His teaching circles were held regularly in the Prophet's

Mosque, and her Hujrah was adjacent to it. Thus, even when he taught people outside the home, she was able to benefit from those lessons. If, due to distance, she did not understand something clearly, she would ask the Prophet about it when he returned to her Hujrah. At times, she would rise and move closer to the mosque. In addition, at the request of women, the Prophet appointed a special day each week for their education and instruction.

These references, which appear in the books of Hadith and Seerah in connection with Aisha al-Siddiqah, do not merely describe the life of the foremost woman in Islamic history. They also reveal a distinctive feature of Islamic society itself. Islamic society serves as a broad institution of learning not only for men but also for women. In such a society, women's education is encouraged, and women are given opportunities to fulfill their intellectual aspirations. It is even possible for a woman, through her own effort, to surpass men in knowledge, as happened in the case of Aisha al-Siddiqah.

In the field of education and personal development, Aisha al-Siddiqah was not merely an exceptional individual; she stands as a role model. Her outstanding achievements in Islamic learning remain a guiding example for Muslim women.

Perhaps no other man or woman was granted as great an opportunity to receive direct religious instruction from

the Prophet of Islam as Aisha al-Siddiqah. Moreover, she was still very young at the time. As a result, she was largely free from what psychologists call conditioning. She was at an age when she could listen with an open and unprejudiced mind, readily absorbing what she heard and making it part of her intellectual makeup.

Aisha was also exceptionally intelligent and possessed a remarkable ability to grasp and retain knowledge. This enabled her to grasp the full depth of the Prophet's teachings. Although the Prophet often spoke in the style of *jawami' al-kalim*—using the fewest words to convey the deepest and most comprehensive meanings. Aisha, through her remarkable power of understanding and inference, comprehended their wider implications and preserved them in her memory.

It was this unique opportunity to learn directly from the Prophet of Islam that made Aisha al-Siddiqah so distinguished in religious understanding and insight. After the Prophet's death, even the most eminent Companions would consult her and benefit from her deep understanding of the wisdom embodied in his teachings. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

FORMATIVE TRAINING UNDER THE PROPHET

From the standpoint of human development, the first ten years of life are generally considered the formative period. It is during these early years that much of a person's character and personality is shaped. This stage is therefore of particular importance for education, nurture and character formation.

With this formative purpose in view, the Prophet of Islam specially selected two individuals during his lifetime: Ali ibn Abi Talib and Aisha bint Abi Bakr. Through their close association with him, they underwent a process of intellectual, moral and spiritual development and acquired what the Quran describes as prophetic wisdom. (2:129)

This kind of formation is most effective during the early, impressionable years of life. In the case of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet took responsibility for his upbringing while he was still young and brought him into his own household. Since no similar arrangement was possible in the case of Aisha, the Prophet married her at an early age. According to traditional accounts, the marriage was

contracted when she was six, and she came to live in the Prophet's household when she was nine. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5188)

Some people have tried to reinterpret the reports concerning Aisha's age at marriage. Such reinterpretation, however, is not necessary. The issue depends largely on the perspective from which the event is viewed. Some see it only as a marriage. In its wider significance, however, it also gave Aisha the opportunity to develop under the Prophet's direct guidance during her formative years.

The outcome supports this understanding. Scholars generally acknowledge that both Ali and Aisha held a distinguished place among the Companions because of their exceptional insight and profound understanding of religion.

Here is a more natural and polished version:

There were two main ways of benefiting from the Prophet's teachings. The first was to preserve his sayings and pass them on to others. Abu Hurayrah was especially distinguished in this field. The second was to listen carefully to the Prophet's words, observe his actions closely, and draw broader principles and insights from them. This kind of learning required long and

continuous companionship. Ali ibn Abi Talib and Aisha bint Abi Bakr were given this opportunity from an early age.

For example, the following saying is attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib:

“A person’s true worth lies in what they excel at.” (*Jami‘ Bayan al-‘Ilm* by Ibn Abd al-Barr, Hadith Nos. 608-609)

These exact words are not found among the sayings of the Prophet. Rather, they express a principle of wisdom that Ali drew from his close companionship with him. The same idea may also be stated more simply: “The value of a person lies in his excellence.”

The same was true of Aisha bint Abi Bakr. Her observations and conclusions are well known and reveal an exceptional depth of wisdom. They were the result of her close and thoughtful study of the Prophet’s life. One example is her perceptive observation:

“Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he chose the easier one.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6786)

The words spoken directly by the Prophet were preserved as Hadith. The special distinction of Ali and Aisha, however, lay in their ability to draw general principles and deeper wisdom from his words and actions. Their close

companionship with the Prophet gave them profound insight, which they later expressed in their own words.

Their association with the Prophet during their formative years proved immensely valuable. It sharpened their powers of observation and developed their ability to understand, absorb and discover the deeper meaning of what they heard and witnessed. (*Al-Risala*, August 2016)

THE PRINCIPLE OF GRADUAL REFORM

According to a report, Aisha explained that the earliest passages of the Quran focused mainly on Paradise and Hell. Commands concerning what was lawful and unlawful were revealed only after people had become receptive to Islam.

She added that, had the prohibition of alcohol been revealed at the very beginning, people would have said, “We will never give up alcohol.” Likewise, had the command against adultery been given at the outset, they would have said, “We will never give up adultery.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4993)

This report highlights an important principle of prophetic wisdom: reform often needs to be introduced gradually. Changing people is a difficult and complex process. They become deeply attached to certain ideas, customs and habits and, over time, begin to regard them as natural and correct. For this reason, they are rarely ready to accept a completely new way of life all at once.

In such circumstances, lasting reform can be achieved

only through wisdom and a gradual process. In Arabia, the Prophet first changed the way people thought and prepared them inwardly to accept a new way of life. Only after they had become mentally and morally receptive were the religious commandments introduced.

Had these laws been imposed before people's outlook had changed and their attitudes had been reformed, the approach would have run counter to human nature. It would not have brought about the deep and lasting transformation that eventually occurred in Arabian society. (*Al-Risala*, January 2001)

THE WISDOM OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Accounts of the peaceful takeover of Makkah relate that the Prophet instructed the Muslims in Madinah to prepare for a journey. As they began making the necessary arrangements, Abu Bakr Siddiq visited the home of his daughter Aisha, the Prophet's wife, and found her helping with the preparations for the journey.

He asked, "Has the Prophet told you to make these preparations?" Aisha replied, "Yes." Abu Bakr then asked, "Where are you going?" She answered, "By God, I do not know." (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. 2, p. 397)

The Prophet made it a practice to maintain strict confidentiality in sensitive matters. He followed the same principle during the campaign that led to his victorious but bloodless entry into Makkah. He left Madinah with ten thousand Companions without revealing their destination. Only when they reached the point where the road turned towards Makkah did the Companions realize where they were heading.

Confidentiality is essential in sensitive collective matters. Success often depends on preventing the other side from learning of a plan in advance. The Prophet observed this principle with great care throughout his life. (*Al-Risala*, January 1999)

AISHA'S DERIVATION OF ISLAMIC RULINGS

Aisha al-Siddiqah is credited with narrating a total of 2,210 hadiths in the major Hadith collections. However, in terms of the total number of narrations, several other Companions narrated more hadiths than she did. For example, Abu Hurayrah narrated 5,364 hadiths, Abdullah ibn Umar narrated 2,630, and Anas ibn Malik narrated 2,286. However, in one respect, Aisha al-Siddiqah holds a superior position: in explaining Hadith and deriving rulings from them.

Aisha al-Siddiqah attained this distinction because, owing to her close companionship with the Prophet of Islam, she had a deeper understanding of his temperament and method. A few examples are given below.

1. In Sahih al-Bukhari, there is a detailed narration from Aisha al-Siddiqah. Its translation is as follows:

“The first chapters of the Quran to be revealed were among the shorter chapters, known as the Mufassal, and they spoke about Paradise and Hell. Then, when people became inclined

towards Islam, the injunctions concerning lawful and unlawful matters were revealed. If the command ‘Do not drink wine’ had been revealed at the beginning, people would have said, ‘We will never give up wine.’ And if the command ‘Do not commit adultery’ had been revealed at the beginning, people would have said, ‘We will never give up adultery.’ While I was still a young girl playing in Makkah, this Quranic verse was revealed: ‘Indeed, the Hour of Doom is their appointed time, and the Last Hour will be the most severe, and the most bitter.’ (54:46) Chapter al-Baqarah and chapter al-Nisa were revealed when I was with him.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4993)

What Aisha al-Siddiqah stated in this narration is not found in the Quran and Hadith in these exact words. However, through her continuous companionship with the Prophet of Islam, she came to understand that the Quranic injunctions were revealed according to the principle of gradualness.

In other words, the process of building a Quran-based society cannot begin with the enforcement of legal penalties and laws. Its proper beginning is to change human thinking and create within people a readiness to accept divine commands. Only after such an intellectual

transformation can practical injunctions be implemented in society.

Aisha al-Siddiqah undoubtedly came to know this important truth through prolonged discussion and reflection with the Prophet of Islam.

2. Another narration from Aisha al-Siddiqah is as follows: "The Battle of Bu'ath was an event that God had prepared in advance for His Messenger. When the Messenger of God came to Madinah, the unity of its people had already been broken, and their chiefs had been killed in mutual fighting. God had prepared this event in advance for His Messenger, so that the people of Madinah might enter Islam." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3777)

The people of Makkah strongly opposed the mission of the Messenger of God. In Madinah, however, situated about three hundred miles away, his message spread without resistance. What explains this difference? The answer is found in the above narration of Aisha al-Siddiqah.

This difference between Makkah and Madinah is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran or in the Prophet's sayings. How, then, did Aisha al-Siddiqah come to understand this important reality? Its source was her close companionship with the Messenger of God. From what he said in his conversations on this subject, Aisha

inferred this truth and then conveyed it to the Muslim community.

According to this narration, the real reason was that, unlike Makkah, Madinah no longer had the powerful tribal chiefs who usually become the main source of such resistance. Shortly before the Prophet's arrival, a civil war had taken place there, in which most of Madinah's leading chiefs had been killed. History shows that resistance to a mission is usually led by leaders. When the leaders of Madinah were no longer present, the root of resistance was removed. As a result, the common people accepted Islam as the voice of their own nature.

3. In Sahih Muslim, it is narrated that after the death of the Messenger of God, during the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphate, Ibn Abi Mulaykah, a student of Aisha al-Siddiqah, asked her: "If the Messenger of God had appointed someone as Caliph, whom would he have appointed?" She replied: "Abu Bakr." He asked: "Who after him?" She replied: "Umar." He asked: "Who after him?" She said: "Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah." When he asked who would come after him, Aisha al-Siddiqah remained silent. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2385)

This narration shows that one of the important lessons Aisha al-Siddiqah learned through her close association with the Prophet of Islam was the great importance of

the individual in collective affairs. Collective life is not built merely through systems or structures. It always requires capable individuals—people endowed with exceptional qualities.

According to Aisha al-Siddiqah, even in the first period of Islamic transformation, there were only three men who could successfully shoulder collective responsibility. From this, it may be inferred that in the matter of social reform, the real task is not to demolish one structure and build another. Rather, the real need is to prepare capable individuals for collective responsibility. This political wisdom, which became known to the Muslim community through Aisha al-Siddiqah, was perhaps not conveyed through anyone else in the same way.

4. Another narration from Aisha al-Siddiqah states that a grave sinner is the poet who satirises an entire tribe. In other words, to condemn a whole tribe because of the fault of one or two individuals is a serious moral wrong. (*Al-Adab al-Mufrad* by al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 874)

This narration shows that generalization in criticism is deeply harmful. It often happens that when a fault is found in one member of a nation or tribe, people begin to condemn the entire group on that basis. From a moral point of view, this is irresponsible, and from an Islamic point of view, it is impermissible. This profound principle

of life was perhaps expressed with such clarity only through Aisha al-Siddiqah.

5. Abu Salamah, a Tabi‘i, says that there was a dispute between him and some people over a piece of land. He mentioned the matter to Aisha al-Siddiqah. She said: “O Abu Salamah, keep away from land disputes, for the Prophet said: ‘Whoever wrongfully takes even a handspan of land will have it placed around his neck from the seven layers of the earth.’” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2453)

This narration points to an important social principle. It means that when a material dispute arises between two individuals or two groups, and the matter cannot be resolved through mutual settlement, the better party is the one who, entrusting the matter to God, ends the dispute unilaterally. This is undoubtedly one of the most important principles for establishing social peace.

6. Ibn Abi al-Sa’ib, a Tabi‘i, was a preacher in Madinah. He used to compose and recite prayers in rhymed prose and was always ready to deliver sermons. Aisha al-Siddiqah said to him, “Promise me three things; otherwise, I will take you to task.”

He asked, “O Mother of the Believers, what are they?”

Aisha al-Siddiqah replied: “Do not compose your prayers in rhymed prose, because the Prophet’s

Companions did not do so. Preach only once a week. If that is not enough for you, then preach twice, or at most three times. Do not make people grow weary of the Book of God. Also, do not approach people while they are sitting together, interrupt their conversation, and begin preaching to them. Speak only when they wish to listen and ask you to do so.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 25820)

This account of Aisha al-Siddiqah reveals the true spirit of religion. According to this spirit, prayer is a sincere expression of the feelings of the heart, whereas a prayer deliberately composed in rhymed prose may involve affectation and insincerity. Similarly, preaching is a word of counsel, and sincere counsel always takes into account the condition and receptivity of the listener. Likewise, the temperament of a believer is to listen carefully to others and, when speaking, to take people's disposition into consideration.

7. A man once asked Aisha al-Siddiqah: “O Mother of the Believers, some people recite the whole Quran two or three times in a single night.” Aisha replied: “They have recited, yet they have not truly recited.” The Messenger of God would stand in prayer throughout the night, yet he would not go beyond Chapters al-Baqarah, al-Imran, and al-Nisa. Whenever he came to a verse containing glad tidings, he would pray to

God; and whenever he came to a verse containing warning, he would seek God's protection. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 24609)

This narration reveals the spirit of religion in two matters: how the Quran should be recited, and what the true form of voluntary prayer is. The Messenger of God generally performed both these acts in his room. Therefore, the wider world could learn these important details only through his wife. Aisha al-Siddiqah fulfilled this role for the Muslim community. This narration shows that what is primarily required in the recitation of the Quran is reflection, not merely what is commonly called completing the Quran.

8. When a new covering is placed on the Kaaba and the old covering is removed, the question arises as to what should be done with the old covering. In earlier times, out of reverence and respect, the old covering would be buried in the ground. Shaybah ibn Uthman, who was the keeper of the key of the Kaaba at that time, told Aisha al-Siddiqah: "We gather the entire covering, dig a deep well, and bury it there, so that people do not wear it while in a state of impurity." Aisha al-Siddiqah said to Shaybah: "This is not right. You are doing wrong. Once the covering has been removed from the Kaaba, it becomes ordinary cloth. If a person in a state of major ritual impurity or a

menstruating woman wears it, there is no harm. You should sell it and give the proceeds to the poor and to travellers.” (*Al-Sunan al-Kubra* by al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 9731)

Through her insight, Aisha al-Siddiqah understood that such reverence was not sanctioned by the Shariah and had not been commanded by God or His Messenger. Aisha al-Siddiqah's view was fully in accordance with the true spirit of religion. Yet this was such a delicate matter that an ordinary Muslim would hardly have had the courage to say it. Through her continuous and close association with the Prophet of Islam, Aisha al-Siddiqah gained a sound understanding of religion. This gave her the confidence to state such matters with certainty.

Many other similar narrations from Aisha al-Siddiqah are found in the books of Hadith. Such narrations show how important it was, from a religious point of view, that Aisha al-Siddiqah became closely attached to the Prophet at an early age. Had this not happened, many pieces of deep wisdoms of religion would not have become known to later generations, for they could only be known through such close learning from the Prophet.

9. Aisha al-Siddiqah narrated an important report. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, this narration has been cited under several chapters because of its different aspects. The wording of the narration is: *Ma khuyyira Rasul Allah*

sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam bayna amrayn illa akhadha aysarahuma—“Whenever the Messenger of God was given a choice between two matters, he would choose the easier of the two.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3560)

In this narration, Aisha al-Siddiqah describes the general policy of the Prophet of Islam. In practical life, his consistent method was that whenever he had to choose between two possible courses, he would leave the harder option and adopt the easier one. This point about the Prophet’s general policy is so profound that it could be understood only through long companionship, and only by someone possessing exceptional intelligence.

No saying of the Prophet of Islam has been reported in exactly these words as a formal principle from his own lips. Yet there is no doubt that this principle is reflected throughout his life. It is therefore of great importance in understanding the life and character of the Prophet.

For example, when the Prophet began his mission of *Tawheed*, or monotheism, in Makkah, one possible course was to destroy the 360 idols placed in the Kaaba, the centre of Islam. But instead of directly confronting the issue of the idols, he began his mission with peaceful communication of the message. This was clearly an instance of choosing the easier option rather than the harder one.

Similarly, towards the end of the Makkan period, he faced a choice between two courses: either to fight the polytheists of Makkah or to migrate from Makkah to Madinah. He chose the second course, which was undoubtedly a case of adopting the easier option rather than the harder one.

Likewise, after the Hijrah, at Hudaibiyah, he again faced a choice between two courses: either to break through the opposition of the polytheists and attempt to enter Makkah for the performance of Umrah, or to return from Hudaibiyah to Madinah. The first course was the way of war, while the second was the way of peace. In this case, he chose the way of peace, which again meant choosing the easier option over the harder one.

The entire life of the Prophet of Islam is an example of this wise method. Through intellectual exchange with the Prophet and deep observation of his practical life, Aisha al-Siddiqah discovered this key principle and conveyed it to the Muslim community. This important key to understanding the Prophet's Seerah was perhaps not made known to the world through any other man or woman in the same way. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

AISHA'S OBSERVATIONS ON HADITH REPORTS

The word *istidrak* literally means the correction of an error. A number of reports attributed to Aisha belong to this category. In them, she corrected the accounts of other narrators. When someone attributed a statement to the Prophet, Aisha would point out that he had not used those exact words and would explain what he had actually said. In Islamic literature, such clarifications are known as Aisha's *istidrakat*.

Hadith scholars have written several works on this subject. One well-known example is *Ayn al-Isabah fi Istidrak Aishah ala al-Sahabah by al-Suyuti*. The edition before me was published by *Maktabat al-Ilm*, Cairo, in 1409 AH. In this book, the author has collected fifty-two corrections made by Aisha.

One such report relates that Aisha was told that Ibn Umar used to say that sudden death was a sign of God's displeasure with believers. She replied, "May God forgive Ibn Umar. What the Prophet actually said was that

sudden death is a relief for believers and a sign of divine displeasure for those who deny the truth.” (*Al-Mu‘jam al-Awsat* by *al-Tabarani*, Hadith No. 3129)

This is more than a record of an exchange between Aisha and another narrator. It also points to a wider principle: in Islam, intellectual and spiritual rank is not determined by gender. A woman who develops her intellect and acquires sound knowledge and understanding can guide men in important matters and take a leading role in life. In marriage, such a woman becomes a great source of strength and support to her husband. (*Al-Risala*, December 2016)

CLARIFYING HADITH REPORTS

One of Aisha al-Siddiqah's unique contributions was that she corrected many narrations which did not accurately convey the intended meaning of the Prophet of Islam's words. Most hadiths reported from the Prophet relate to conversations that took place in gatherings. It sometimes happened that a Companion entered a gathering midway, heard part of the Prophet's speech, and missed another part. Similarly, a Companion might hear a statement of the Prophet without knowing the particular context in which it was said.

For such reasons, ambiguity sometimes entered the narrations of certain Companions, and their reports did not fully represent the Prophet's intended meaning. Aisha al-Siddiqah undertook the task of clarifying such reports by placing them in their proper context. As the Prophet's wife, she was in his company every day. As his life companion, she was able to understand matters in greater detail and depth. On the basis of this distinctive position, she corrected those narrations of the Companions in

which the Prophet's words had not been conveyed in their proper context.

In the terminology of hadith scholars, this kind of correction is called *istidrak*. Several leading scholars of Hadith collected these *istidrakat*. One such treatise was prepared by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, entitled '*Ayn al-Isabah fi Istidrak 'Aishah 'ala al-Sahabah*. To understand this matter, a few examples are given below.

According to a narration in Sahih al-Bukhari, Abdullah ibn Umar reported the following statement concerning bathing: "I heard the Messenger of God say: Whoever among you comes for the Friday prayer should take a bath." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 894)

Abdullah ibn Umar narrated this hadith in a simple form. Outwardly, it may give the impression that bathing on Friday is an absolute command. However, when Aisha al-Siddiqah narrated the same hadith, she also explained its reason—a reason she certainly came to know through her close companionship with the Prophet of Islam. She narrated it as follows:

"People used to come for the Friday prayer from their homes and from the settlements outside Madinah. They would arrive covered with dust and perspiration. On one occasion, one of them came to the Prophet while he was with me. The Messenger of God said: 'It would have been

better if you had purified yourselves for this day.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 902)

In Abdullah ibn Umar’s narration, the Prophet’s statement is reported in an absolute form, which may create the misunderstanding that bathing is, as it were, a part of the Friday prayer itself. But Aisha al-Siddiqah narrated the statement in its proper background. This makes it clear that the bath was required because of a physical need; it was not a ritual component of the prayer.

Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Umar, and some other Companions narrated that the Prophet said: *Inna al-mayyita la-yu’adhdhabu bi-buka’i ahlihi ‘alayh*—“The deceased is punished because of his family’s weeping over him.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1286)

When this narration was mentioned before Aisha al-Siddiqah, she said that the Messenger of God had not said it in that sense. The actual incident was that one day the Prophet passed by the funeral of a non-Muslim, while her relatives were weeping over her. He said: “They are weeping over her, while she is being punished.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 932)

Aisha al-Siddiqah’s point was that weeping is not the cause of punishment. Rather, the two matters are separate. The mourners were weeping over her death, while the deceased was suffering the consequences of her past

deeds. Weeping is the act of others, and they themselves will bear responsibility for it. The deceased cannot be held accountable for it. Every person is answerable only for his or her own deeds.

This explanation by Aisha al-Siddiqah concerning the Prophet's statement shows that in such matters, regular discussion took place between the Prophet and Aisha. Through these discussions, matters became clear to Aisha that generally remained unknown to others.

At the Battle of Badr, when some of the polytheists were killed, the Messenger of God stood at their place of burial and said: "Have you found that what your Lord promised you is true?" (Quran, 7:44)

The Companions asked: "O Messenger of God, are you addressing the dead?" Ibn Umar, probably narrating from Umar, and Anas ibn Malik, narrating from Abu Talhah, reported that the Prophet replied: "You do not hear better than they do, but they cannot reply." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1370)

When this narration was mentioned to Aisha al-Siddiqah, she said that the Messenger of God did not say it in that form. Rather, he said: "They now know that what I used to say to them was true." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1371)

What Aisha al-Siddiqah said was based on deep religious understanding. Where did she acquire such exceptional depth of religious insight? There can be only one answer: she acquired it through her close and continuous learning from the Prophet of Islam.

Some people came to Aisha al-Siddiqah and said that Abu Hurayrah narrated from the Messenger of God: “Bad omen is found in three things: a woman, a horse, and a house.” Aisha replied that this was not correct. Abu Hurayrah had heard one part of the statement and missed the other. What the Messenger of God had actually said was: “The Jews say that bad omen is found in three things: a woman, a horse, and a house.” (*Musnad Abu Dawud al-Tayalisi*, Hadith No. 1641; *Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 25168)

Aisha’s clarification is extremely important. Had she not clarified the matter, Abu Hurayrah’s narration would have left a lasting ambiguity on this issue—an ambiguity that no one else could have removed.

Abdullah ibn Abbas narrated that the Prophet saw God twice: once on the occasion of the Mi‘raj, and once on the occasion mentioned in *Surah al-Najm*. With reference to this, Masruq, a Tabi‘i, asked Aisha al-Siddiqah: “O Mother of the Believers, did the Prophet see God?” Aisha replied: “You have said something that has made the hair on my body stand on end. Whoever tells you that Muhammad

saw his Lord has lied.” She then recited the verse: “No vision can grasp Him, but He grasps all vision; and He is the Subtle, the All-Aware.” (Quran, 6:103) After this, Aisha recited another verse of the Quran (42:51): “It is not granted to any human being that God should speak to him other than by revelation or from behind a veil.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4855)

The clarification that Aisha al-Siddiqah made in this matter required extraordinary religious courage. Such courage could be found only in someone who had spent a long period in the company of the Prophet of Islam and, through intellectual exchange with him on such matters, had acquired deep insight into religion.

When Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri was near death, he asked for new clothes and put them on. He explained that the Messenger of God had said: “A Muslim will be raised in the same clothing in which he dies.” When Aisha al-Siddiqah came to know of this, she said: “May God have mercy on Abu Sa‘id. By clothing, the Messenger of God meant a person’s deeds. Otherwise, the Prophet clearly stated that people will be raised on the Day of Resurrection barefoot, unclothed, and uncircumcised.” (*Ayn al-Isabah* by al-Suyuti, p. 49)

This clarification by Aisha al-Siddiqah reveals an important principle: to understand a hadith correctly, it is sometimes necessary not to take a statement literally, but to understand it symbolically.

On one occasion, the Prophet instructed that the meat of sacrifice should not be kept for more than three days. On the basis of the apparent wording, some Companions understood this command to be permanent. Aisha al-Siddiqah explained the wisdom behind the instruction and clarified that it was a temporary ruling. A man asked her: “Did the Messenger of God prohibit eating the meat of sacrifice after three days?” Aisha replied: “No. At that time, only a few people were able to offer sacrifice. Therefore, the Prophet gave this instruction so that those who had offered sacrifice would feed those who had not.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 24707)

This correction by Aisha al-Siddiqah further shows that it is permissible to preserve sacrificial meat for a long period by modern methods. In relation to the present age, this clarification is extremely important. Had Aisha al-Siddiqah’s explanation not been available, the wisdom behind the hadith would have remained unclear, and people might have considered the preservation and later use of sacrificial meat to be contrary to Islamic teaching.

It appears that the narrator, in his simplicity, did not fully understand the Prophet’s words. The Prophet had referred to a belief held by the people of the pre-Islamic age, but the narrator mistakenly attributed that belief to the Prophet himself. Aisha al-Siddiqah, however, possessed exceptional intelligence and, through her long

and close association with the Prophet, had gained a deep understanding of the spirit of religion. Therefore, she immediately grasped the real point. As soon as she heard the narrator's statement, she recognized the reality on the basis of her religious insight, rejected the incorrect attribution, and explained the matter in its proper form.

These few examples show the greatness of Aisha al-Siddiqah's contribution to Islam. In fact, studying her narrations is extremely important for understanding the true spirit of Islam.

Perhaps the most important legacy later generations received through Aisha was her deep religious insight. Through her extraordinary intelligence and her complete dedication to Islam, she attained a depth of understanding in which perhaps no one was her equal. On the basis of this deep insight, she guided the Muslim community directly for nearly half a century. As for her indirect guidance, it continues to this day and will undoubtedly continue until the Day of Judgment.

The reality is that religion has two levels: the outward form of religion and the inner reality of religion. A man or woman who receives religion only at the outward level is like someone who has received a fruit only at the level of its peel. But a man or woman who receives religion at the level of its deeper meaning is like someone who has

reached the kernel of the fruit. It is this second kind of person who truly possesses the fruit.

Aisha al-Siddiqah understood God's religion in its true spirit. In this way, she not only shaped herself into an elevated, God-oriented personality, but through her life she also established a great historical example of how any man or woman can attain such a high level of realization in religion.

In the early period of the Prophet of Islam's life, he married Khadijah, who was fifteen years older than him. In the later period of his life, he married Aisha, who was much younger than him. Both marriages were extremely significant. In the early period of the Prophet's life, he needed an experienced woman; in the later period, a young woman like Aisha was needed, as will become clear in the next chapter. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

AISHA'S MARRIAGE AND HER HISTORIC ROLE

One question concerning Aisha al-Siddiqah relates to her age at the time of marriage. Authentic narrations in the books of Hadith state that her marriage to the Prophet of Islam took place in Makkah, when she was six years old. Later, her formal departure to the Prophet's household took place in Madinah, when she was nine years old. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5133)

In modern times, much has been written on this subject. Orientalists have raised questions about the noble character of the Prophet of Islam on this basis. It is argued that marriage to a young girl is contrary to refined moral conduct, and that such an act casts doubt on a person's claim to prophethood.

This question existed in earlier times as well, though not with the same intensity as today. In the past, it was generally raised on juristic grounds rather than moral grounds: is it permissible for an older man to marry a young minor girl? Classical scholars tried to answer this in the traditional manner. For example, Ibn Hazm records

Ibn Shubrumah's view in these words: "He claimed that the Prophet's marriage to Aisha when she was six years old was among his special privileges." (*Fath al-Bari* by Ibn Hajar, Vol. 9, p. 190)

This explanation is not logical, because the special privileges of a prophet belong to him in his capacity as a prophet of God, not in any other capacity. Moreover, no such marriage is established from the life of any other prophet.

In modern times, scholars have tried to defend this matter in different ways. For example, Mawlana Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi, while discussing this subject in his book, writes: "When Aisha was married, she was six years old. The real purpose of this early marriage was to strengthen the relationship between Prophethood and Caliphate. First, the warm climate of Arabia naturally gave women an unusual capacity for physical development. Second, it is generally observed that just as distinguished individuals possess an extraordinary capacity for mental and intellectual development, they may also possess a special capacity for physical growth. In English, this is called precociousness." (*Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi, Sirat Aisha, Dar al-Musannifin*, Azamgarh, p. 24)

In Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi's book, the word is written as "pre-conscious." The English spelling, however, is not given. In my view, the English word probably intended by

the author was not “pre-conscious” but “precocious.” In English, precocious means premature or unusually early development:

Precocious: “Ripe before the proper or natural time; premature; developed or matured earlier than usual.” (*Webster*)

“Of a child: having developed particular abilities and ways of behaving at a much younger age than usual; sexually precocious.” (*Oxford*)

However, neither Hadith nor history establishes that Aisha al-Siddiqah's case was one of precocious development. The entire explanation, therefore, rests on assumption. In any case, this answer is irrelevant to the real issue. The real issue is that authentic narrations state, with numerical specificity, that the marriage contract took place at the age of six and the formal departure to the Prophet's household at the age of nine, while the Messenger of God was then over fifty years old. The real question concerns this established difference in age, not physical maturity.

Similarly, some people argue that among the Arabs, before marriage, it was customary to settle the matter of a relationship in advance. This was similar to what is called fixing a match or engagement in our society. The Quran mentions only nikah, not engagement or betrothal. Therefore, when the narrations say that Aisha's nikah took

place at the age of six and her formal departure at the age of nine, the word nikah, according to the custom of Arab society, means the settlement of the marriage proposal, or engagement, while the formal departure refers to the actual marriage. (Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, *Letters to Tahirah*, “The Age of Aisha,” pp. 1-2)

This explanation, too, is not correct. When the word nikah appears in Hadith, it must be understood in its recognized meaning of marriage contract. To take the word nikah in any other sense, evidence must be found within the text of the Hadith itself, and no such evidence exists. Moreover, this explanation does not remove the real objection. Whether the age of marriage is taken as six or nine, in either case it remains a marriage at a young age. What, then, is gained by this explanation?

Similarly, some people put forward another argument. They say that Aisha al-Siddiqah criticized certain narrations of the Companions and said: “I do not say that these people lie, but ears sometimes make mistakes in hearing.” Several such criticisms are found in Bukhari and Muslim. This shows that a narrator may sometimes be highly reliable, yet the narration he reports may contain an error.

Sometimes this happens because the narrator has heard only part of a statement. Sometimes he misunderstands the meaning, and sometimes he forgets. Regarding the

Mother of the Believers, they say that the narrator made a mistake in hearing: the phrase spoken was *tis'a* 'ashar—nineteen—but the narrator heard only *tis'a*—nine. In this way, the story arose that Aisha was nine years old, for ears sometimes make mistakes in hearing. (Habib al-Rahman Siddiqui Kandhlawi, *'Umar e Aisha*, Karachi, October 1994, pp. 8-9)

This analogy, too, is not correct. The principle referred to above could apply to a narration of Aisha al-Siddiqah only if both the narrator and the person questioning the report had personally heard the original statement. One listener may say of another listener that he made a mistake in hearing, and that, according to what I heard, the actual statement was different. But a person who was not present and did not hear the statement himself has no right to reject a narration on the basis of such an analogy. This kind of reasoning is wholly unsound. If such an extended analogy is accepted as a valid principle, people may produce all kinds of conjectures that could distort the entire form of religion.

The proper starting point of discussion in this matter is not why a young girl was married to a much older man. Rather, the proper starting point is to understand why Aisha al-Siddiqah became such an exceptional figure in history. The question of her marriage must be understood in the light of her exceptional historical role, not the other way around.

It is an established fact that, in the whole of Muslim history, Aisha al-Siddiqah holds a unique and distinguished position in terms of her role. She understood the spirit of Islam with a depth perhaps unmatched by any other man or woman. She explained the delicate aspects of religion with a confidence that no one else displayed in the same way. Nor do we find anyone, either in the age of the Companions or in later generations, who explained the underlying principles and deeper insights of religion with the same clarity and insight. The answer to the central issue lies in the answer to this very question.

The fact is that the highest attainment in Islam is *maarifah*, or realization of God. The Prophet received this realization in its complete form directly from God through Gabriel. The question, then, is how this highest level of realization could be transmitted after the Prophet. It was for this purpose that Aisha al-Siddiqah was chosen. Practically speaking, there was only one way for this to happen: Aisha had to be given the opportunity to be in the Prophet's company from an early age. Such a high level of realization required close companionship. And the opportunity for such sustained association with a person could be available only to his wife, and to no one else.

The study of psychology shows that a child in the early years is highly inquisitive and eager to learn about the world around him or her. Moreover, in early childhood,

the mind is very sharp and quickly grasps new things. Studies also show that memory is especially strong in the early years. What a person learns in early life is rarely forgotten. The idea of beginning a child's schooling at an early age is based on this very principle.

Aisha al-Siddiqah was an exceptionally intelligent woman with a highly receptive mind. Therefore, it was God's will that she should be placed in the Prophet's continuous company from an early age. The only practical form of such close and continuous companionship was for her to become his wife and life companion. It was under this special divine plan that Aisha al-Siddiqah entered the marital household of the Prophet of Islam at a young age.

Outwardly, this marriage was unusual and contrary to common practice. For this reason, it was quite possible that the Prophet of Islam might not have accepted it, or might not even have considered the proposal. Perhaps because of this sensitivity, an angel came to him and gave him prior indication of this extraordinary relationship, so that he would have no hesitation in the matter.

In some respects, this was similar to what had happened earlier in the case of Mary. Mary could naturally have felt great hesitation at the prospect of giving birth to a child without a father. Therefore, God sent an angel to her in

advance. The angel appeared before her in human form and informed her of the matter. This is mentioned clearly in the Quran. (19:17)

The angel's prior indication concerning this marriage is established through authentic narrations. Aisha relates that the Messenger of God said to her: "You were shown to me in a dream. An angel brought you to me wrapped in a piece of silk and said: 'This is your wife.' I uncovered your face and saw that it was you. I said: 'If this is from God, He will bring it to pass.'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5125)

Aisha al-Siddiqah lived with the Prophet of Islam for eleven years. Since she was much younger than him, she lived for nearly fifty years after his death. During this half-century, she continued to serve as a means of disseminating prophetic knowledge. The accounts of her life show that Aisha al-Siddiqah brought to light profound aspects of the wisdom underlying religious teachings that do not appear to have reached the Muslim community through any other Companion.

Moreover, through her close association with the Prophet, she gained extraordinary certainty regarding the soundness of her understanding of religion. This is why she spoke on delicate religious matters with a decisiveness and confidence that no one else, before or after her, could display in the same manner.

It often happens that, out of reverence and devotion, people form opinions that do not correspond to the actual facts. Once such views become widespread, ordinary people usually do not have the courage to challenge them. At such times, extraordinary insight is required. Only a person endowed with exceptional insight can dare to speak with certainty. Aisha al-Siddiqah acquired this insight through her continuous companionship with the Prophet of Islam, and it enabled her to speak and act with complete confidence.

For example, after the death of the Prophet, it began to be said during the period of the Tabi'un that the Prophet of Islam had seen God with his own eyes. When Aisha al-Siddiqah heard this, she became deeply disturbed and said: *Man haddathaka anna Muhammadan sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam ra'a rabbahu faqad kadhab*—"Whoever tells you that Muhammad saw his Lord has made a false statement." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4855)

Similarly, after the Prophet's death, the practice of repeatedly completing the Quran became widespread. Instead of emphasizing reflection upon the Quran, people began to attach importance to completing it again and again through verbal recitation. Great rewards were associated with such completions. When this was mentioned to Aisha al-Siddiqah, and she was told that certain people completed the Quran several times in a single day, she

did not approve of it. Rather, she said: *Ula'ika qara'u wa lam yaqra'u*—"They have recited, yet they have not truly recited." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 24609)

Because she was the wife of the Messenger of God, people could trust her judgment in such delicate matters. Had someone else made similar statements, people might have found it difficult to accept them.

There is a narration in which Yusuf ibn Mahak says: "I was with Aisha, the Mother of the Believers, when an Iraqi man came to her and asked: 'Which type of shroud is best?' Aisha replied: 'Woe to you! What harm does it do you?' He then said: 'O Mother of the Believers, show me your copy of the Quran.' She asked: 'Why?' He replied: 'So that I may compile a Quran according to it, for people are reciting it in different arrangements.' Aisha said: 'What harm does it do you which part you read first? Read it as you have been reading it.'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4993)

The confidence and clarity with which Aisha al-Siddiqah represented the spirit of Islam in this conversation are highly significant. She was able to speak with such certainty only because, through her close companionship with the Prophet of Islam, she had fully grasped the spirit of Islam. She knew, without the slightest doubt, what Islam required in such matters.

Further examples of Aisha al-Siddiqah's insight and understanding will be found in other chapters of this book. These examples show that the question of her age at marriage is only a secondary issue. The decisive point is that the educational and formative purpose served by this marriage could not have been achieved through any alternative arrangement. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

A MARRIAGE IN A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

The Prophet of Islam's first marriage was to Khadijah, a respected and influential woman of Makkah. Through this marriage, he gained a strong position of social support within Makkan society. This support remained with him for nearly twenty-five years. Anyone committed to a mission needs a stable social base from which to carry the work forward.

After Khadijah's death, the Prophet married Aisha. The marriage took place towards the end of the Makkan period, and Aisha joined his household in Madinah after the Hijrah. At the time, she was nine years old and the Prophet was fifty-three. The wide difference in their ages has been the subject of much discussion, but many interpretations overlook the broader historical context.

The marriage was not simply a personal arrangement. After Khadijah's death, it also created a new family bond that strengthened the Prophet's social support. His already close relationship with Aisha's father, Abu Bakr Siddiq, was now reinforced by ties of kinship. Historical accounts

show that Abu Bakr remained one of the Prophet's most trusted and dependable companions throughout his life. After the Prophet's death, he also played a decisive role in preserving the stability of the early Muslim community.

In the natural order of life, every person needs social support. According to the Quran, such support is formed chiefly through two kinds of relationships: ties of blood and ties created through marriage. These natural bonds give a person security and a recognized place within society. Even a prophet needs such support. It is part of the unchanging order of human life.

A guiding verse of the Quran states: "It is He who created the human being from water and established for him relationships of blood and marriage. Your Lord is all-powerful." (25:54)

This verse draws attention to an important blessing of the Creator. Human relationships are formed mainly in two ways: through blood ties and through marriage. These natural bonds form the foundation of social life. Without them, society would lose much of its stability and order. They give individuals a sense of belonging and provide them with support and protection. The Quran refers to this social reality in the account of the Prophet Shu'ayb. His people said: "Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say. In fact, we see that you are powerless among us. Were it not for your clan, we would have stoned you, for you are not strong against us." (11:91)

This Quranic reference supports the explanation given above. During the Makkan period, the Prophet continually received such natural support—first from Banu Hashim, then from Khadijah’s family and later through his family relationship with Abu Bakr. These ties of blood and marriage provided him with social support and protection.

Seen in this wider context, the Prophet’s marriage to Aisha also had an important social dimension. Through this marriage, his already close relationship with Abu Bakr became a bond of kinship. Abu Bakr remained one of the Prophet’s closest and most dependable companions throughout his life. After the Prophet’s death, he became the first caliph and played a decisive role in preserving the unity and stability of the Muslim community during its earliest period. (*Al-Risala*, April 2017)

THE WISDOM BEHIND THE MARRIAGE

As is known, Aisha al-Siddiqah was under ten years old when her marriage to the Prophet of Islam took place. After the marriage, she lived with him throughout the entire Madinan period. This ten-year period was the most eventful period in the early history of Islam. Throughout these years, she remained continuously in the company of the Prophet of Islam, even accompanying him on journeys. Thus, for Aisha al-Siddiqah, this ten-year period was like an association with a living school.

This was the real purpose behind Aisha al-Siddiqah's marriage to the Prophet of Islam at a young age. At that time, she was in the stage of life known as the formative period. The study of psychology shows that by about the age of ten, the mind of a person is largely formed. Its conditioning has already become so strong that breaking it at a later stage becomes extremely difficult.

It appears that Aisha al-Siddiqah's father, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, understood this secret. According to a carefully considered plan, he arranged the marriage of his intelligent

daughter to the Prophet of Islam at a young age. This took place with the full consent of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the first Caliph. It involved both deep sincerity and great wisdom.

The result of this marriage—or, in other words, this educational planning—was something that perhaps has no parallel in human history. As a result of this planning, a capable personality like Aisha al-Siddiqah was formed. During the most receptive stage of her life, she had, perhaps more than anyone else, the opportunity to learn directly from the final Prophet and develop under his guidance. In this way, she became a complete inheritor of prophetic knowledge. After the death of the Prophet of Islam, she continued for nearly fifty years to disseminate this knowledge among people. In an age before the printing press and the tape recorder, she became, as it were, a living recorder of the Prophet of Islam.

This transmission of prophetic knowledge through Aisha al-Siddiqah continued for a long period after the death of the Prophet of Islam. This became possible only because she had entered the Prophet's household at a young age. Had Aisha al-Siddiqah been approximately the same age as the Prophet of Islam, both would have passed away around the same time, with only a slight difference. When the Prophet's voice fell silent, Aisha al-Siddiqah's voice too would have fallen silent, and the transmission of prophetic knowledge would have come to an abrupt end.

It should also be added that this kind of acquisition of knowledge from the Prophet could not have taken place through a man. For this purpose, a woman was required—one who could live with him continuously as his wife. Only a woman, as his wife, could remain in such constant companionship with him; a man could not. Seen in the light of these considerations, Aisha al-Siddiqah's marriage was a far-reaching arrangement whose benefit has reached all humanity and will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment. If the various aspects of this matter are considered objectively, it is not difficult to understand that what happened was the only possible arrangement. There was, in fact, no alternative that could have fulfilled this need.

The original sources of Islam are the Quran and Hadith. The Quran and Hadith may be called the text of Islam. This text is, as it were, the literal statement of Islam. Anyone who wishes to know what Islam is can learn it by studying the Quran and Hadith.

However, there is another element that holds great importance in religion, and that is companionship. Companionship does not mean merely sitting silently in a gathering. It necessarily includes intellectual exchange. In the true sense, a person benefits from companionship when he or she participates in a gathering in such a way as to receive direct benefit from the one whose company

is being shared: increasing knowledge through questions and answers, clarifying unclear matters through further discussion, and at the same time receiving personal benefit from the person's experience, spirituality, and God-realization.

The Companions were living examples of the benefits of their association with the Prophet. In Aisha, however, an exceptional example was established. Her close relationship with the Prophet became a particularly complete model of what could be gained from such association. Moreover, this model continued, long after the death of the Prophet of Islam, to make people aware of the importance of companionship.

Aisha al-Siddiqah is, as it were, a living embodiment of the principle of companionship. In her life, the principle of companionship took the form of an institution. This institution must now be kept alive permanently within the Muslim community. Senior members of every generation should continue to pass on this benefit of companionship to the men and women of the next generation, so that Islam may remain preserved not only in the form of text, but also through the intellectual and spiritual benefit provided by the institution of companionship. (*Aurat Memar e Insaniyat*)

LESSONS FROM CHAPTER 24, AL-NUR

In 6 AH, the Prophet set out on a journey with his Companions. His wife, Aisha al-Siddiqah, accompanied him, riding on a separate camel.

On the return journey, the caravan stopped at one place. Before it resumed its journey, Aisha went some distance from the camp at night to relieve herself. On her way back, she discovered that her necklace was missing, so she returned to look for it. The search delayed her.

Meanwhile, the caravan prepared to leave. Those responsible for lifting her howdah (a covered camel-borne carriage) assumed that she was inside and placed it on the camel. The caravan then departed, unaware that she had been left behind.

When Aisha returned, she found the campsite deserted. She decided to remain there, thinking that once the caravan discovered her absence, someone would return to look for her. After some time, she fell asleep.

Safwan ibn al-Muattal usually travelled behind the

caravan to see whether anything had been left behind. When he reached the campsite the following morning, he saw someone sleeping there. As he drew nearer, he recognized Aisha and exclaimed:

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un. That is, we belong to God, and to Him we shall return.

Hearing his voice, Aisha awoke and covered her face with her shawl. Without speaking, Safwan brought his camel close to her and made it kneel. Aisha mounted the camel, and Safwan took hold of its reins and led it forward. They caught up with the caravan around midday.

When news of the incident spread in Madinah, some malicious people seized the opportunity to make a false accusation against the Prophet's wife and thereby discredit his religious mission. Even some sincere but unsuspecting Muslims became involved in repeating the allegation. Among them were Hassan ibn Thabit, Mistah ibn Uthathah and Hamnah bint Jahsh.

The rumour continued to circulate for more than a month. Finally, verses of the Quran were revealed rejecting the accusation and providing clear guidance concerning the matter. A translation of some of these verses is given below:

Those who defame chaste women, but cannot produce four witnesses, shall be given eighty

lashes. Do not accept their testimony ever after, for they are transgressors, save those who afterwards repent and make amends, for truly God is forgiving and merciful. (24:4-5)

Those who brought up that slander were a band from among you. Do not regard it as a misfortune, for it is good for you. Every one of them shall be held to account for the sin he has committed; and he who took the greater part in it shall have a terrible punishment. When you heard of it, why did not the believing men and believing women think well of their own people, and say, 'This is a manifest slander?' Why did they not produce four witnesses? If they could not produce any witnesses, they were indeed liars in the sight of God! Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you in this world and the Hereafter, a terrible punishment would have afflicted you for your plunging headlong into slander. When you were spreading it with your tongues and saying with your mouths things of which you had no knowledge, you considered it to be a trivial matter, but, in God's sight, it was very serious. When you heard it, why did you not say, 'It is not right for us to speak of this. God forbid! This is a monstrous slander.'

God warns you never to repeat the like of it again, if you are true believers. God explains the commandments to you. God is all knowing and wise. Those who desire that indecencies should spread among the believers, will have a painful chastisement in this world and the Hereafter. God knows, and you do not know. (24:11-19)

It is forbidden for one Muslim to attack the honour of another. When the person concerned is a Muslim woman, the offence becomes even more serious. A report recorded by al-Tabarani states:

“To falsely accuse a chaste Muslim woman destroys the good deeds of a hundred years.”
(*Al-Mu‘jam al-Kabir* by al-Tabarani, Hadith No. 3023)

According to a report recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet said, “Avoid the seven destructive sins.” The people asked, “O Messenger of God, what are they?” He replied: “Associating partners with God, practising magic, taking a life that God has made sacred except by right, consuming interest, misappropriating the property of an orphan, fleeing from the battlefield, and falsely accusing innocent, chaste believing women.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2766; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 89)

This incident contains several important lessons. Some of them are given below:

1. Those who used a simple incident to launch a campaign of slander were not merely trying to discredit the Prophet or his wife. Their larger aim was to discredit the message of Islam. By casting doubt on the Prophet's moral character, they hoped to cast doubt on his mission as well.

This has been the method of evil forces in every age. Yet such attempts can never succeed, however widespread they may become. Whenever the call of truth arises, it does so with God's support. To discredit it is, in effect, to oppose God's plan, and no one can succeed by opposing His plan. The call of truth is destined to endure until the distinction between truth and falsehood has become fully clear.

2. In this world of trial, even an innocent person may sometimes become involved in a situation that can be misunderstood. Those who have no fear of God may then use it as an opportunity to damage that person's reputation.

At such times, God-fearing people must think well of others. They should not accept an accusation merely because they have heard it, nor should they repeat it without first examining the facts.

3. For an accusation of this kind to be accepted, it must be supported by the testimony of four reliable witnesses. If the accuser fails to produce four witnesses, the accusation will be treated as false, and the accuser will be punished with eighty lashes.

If the person later admits the wrongdoing and reforms, there is hope that God will forgive them. Even then, according to this ruling, the person will no longer be regarded as a reliable witness, and their testimony will not be accepted in the future.

4. Falsely accusing a chaste woman is an extremely serious offence. It brings severe punishment not only in the Hereafter but also in this world. To attack another person's honour is an act of moral degradation. When such baseness becomes part of an offence, it takes a person far from God's mercy.

Hell then comes so close to such a person that they begin to experience its consequences even in this world. The truth is that an attack on another person is, first and foremost, an attack on oneself.

5. A truly Islamic society is one in which God remains at the centre of people's lives. In such a society, every person speaks with the awareness

that they will one day answer to God for every word they have uttered. A believer must therefore be extremely careful in what they say.

Those who spread rumours damage the God-conscious character of Muslim society. They poison its collective life and, in the sight of God, commit a serious wrong. They may be able to offer persuasive explanations in this world, but they should not assume that the same excuses will protect them before God.

The Hereafter is the place where every reality will be laid bare. Only those who lived by the truth will be found free of blame. Those who turned away from it will discover that there is nowhere to hide.

6. An incident may appear entirely harmful and yet contain an unseen good. Events of this kind reveal people as they really are. They show who is responsible and who is careless, who wishes others well and who is driven by jealousy and resentment, who speaks with a sense of accountability before God and who speaks without any such restraint.

In this way, such incidents expose those who harbour ill will. At the same time, they give those who stand by the truth an opportunity to remain patient with God's help and thereby become worthy of His further blessings.

7. This incident also shows how bitter the opposition to truth can become when the message is presented in a pure and uncompromising form, especially when people feel that their own position is under threat.

Some opponents are simply worldly-minded. They may resist a mission of truth, but their hostility usually remains within certain limits. They may try to defeat its advocate, but they do not necessarily seek to disgrace him.

An incident from the time of the Battle of Uhud illustrates this. As the Makkan army marched towards Madinah, it passed through Abwa, where Aminah bint Wahb, the Prophet's mother, was buried. Some hot-headed members of the Quraysh suggested digging up her grave and dishonouring her remains. Others among the Quraysh strongly rejected the proposal and prevented it from being carried out. (*Akhbar Makkah* by al-Azraqi, Vol. 2, p. 272)

They were on their way to fight the Prophet, yet they were unwilling to stoop to such a degrading form of insult. Certain Jewish opponents, however, who regarded themselves as the sole guardians of truth, took a different course. They seized upon various incidents as pretexts for attacking the Prophet and tried to damage his moral reputation. According to this account, they were chiefly responsible for the campaign of slander mentioned above.

When people who see themselves as the exclusive representatives of truth feel that their position is threatened, their response can become extreme. They do not merely try to weaken the opposing mission; they may also seek to disgrace its advocate. In order to preserve their religious authority, they begin to regard every method as justified, however degrading or morally objectionable it may be. (*Al-Risala*, May 1980)

IRRELIGIOUS CONDUCT IN THE NAME OF RELIGION

During the Madinan period, an unusual incident involving Aisha al-Siddiqah occurred. Some people misinterpreted it and turned it into a malicious story. The baseless allegation soon spread throughout Madinah. Those who repeated it may have believed that they were conveying something true, but in reality they were spreading a falsehood. The Quran describes this situation in verse 24:15. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi translated the relevant words into Urdu as:

*Jabki tum is jhooth ko apni zabanon se naql dar naql
kar rahe the.*

In English, this may be rendered as: When you kept passing this lie from one tongue to another.

The controversy ended only when Chapter 24 was revealed and the accusation was directly refuted through divine revelation.

In this connection, Chapter 24 gave Muslims certain instructions so that they would not repeat such a serious

mistake in the future. One important instruction was:

“Why, when you heard it, did believing men and women not think well of one another and say, ‘This is clearly a false accusation’?”
(Quran 24:12)

Explaining this verse, Ibn Kathir writes that the believers should have judged the matter by applying it to themselves. If they considered such conduct unthinkable for themselves, then Aisha, the Mother of the Believers, was even more deserving of being regarded as innocent. (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 3, p. 273)

When a Muslim hears something that casts suspicion on another Muslim, the first response should be to ask, “Could I myself do such a thing?” If the answer of one’s conscience is, “No, I could not,” then the same favourable view should be extended to the other person. No one should be assumed guilty without evidence.

It is in such moments that the difference becomes clear between those who truly possess faith and those who merely claim to possess it. The proof that a person follows religion does not lie in raising slogans of moral reform. The real proof is that they themselves follow the Quranic principle of thinking well of others.

To speak loudly in the name of reform may simply be a way of seeking religious leadership. To think well of

others, by contrast, is a genuine expression of obedience to God's religion.

The account concerning Aisha Siddiqah may be found in my Quran commentary, *Tazkir al-Quran*, and in other commentaries under Chapter 24. There is therefore no need to repeat the details here.

It is important to remember that Aisha was widely respected in Madinah and was known as a woman of impeccable character. Her whole life was devoted to God's cause. Yet some people seized upon a single incident, turned it into a scandal and used it to damage her reputation. These same people had never spoken of her valuable religious contribution. Their gatherings were so silent about Aisha and her work that it seemed as though neither she nor her services existed in Madinah.

But the moment they found an incident that could be misrepresented and used against her, their entire group sprang into action. They used every means at their disposal to spread the fabricated story. They passed it from person to person and tried to create suspicion about Aisha. Eventually, they filled the whole of Madinah with rumours and mistrust.

In their own eyes, they were merely passing on news of an "incident." In the sight of God, however, they were committing a grave offence. They were not serving the

cause of God's religion; they were advancing the cause of Satan.

Anyone who fears accountability before God must form opinions on the basis of facts, not rumours or sensational claims. When a misunderstanding arises, one should meet the person concerned and clarify the matter directly. An unverified suspicion should never be treated as fact and spread among the public.

Such conduct may rightly be described as hypocritical. According to the Quran, those who persist in hypocrisy face a punishment more severe than that of open deniers, unless they repent, openly acknowledge their wrongdoing and seek forgiveness from those they have harmed. (*Al-Risala*, February 1999)

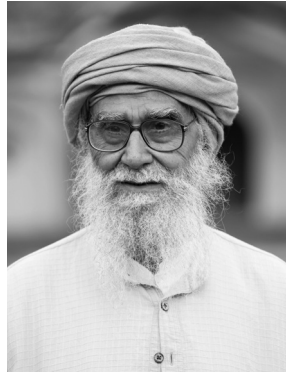
AN EXEMPLARY WOMAN

Aisha bint Abu Bakr al-Siddiq is an outstanding example of Islamic scholarship. She was the wife of the Prophet of Islam and lived for nearly fifty years after his death. Throughout this long period, she continued to pass on the wisdom and teachings of Islam. In an age before modern recording methods, she became a living repository of the Prophet's teachings. Her knowledge and understanding of Islam were so deep that even the Prophet's Companions travelled from distant places to seek guidance from her.

Aisha's life offers an inspiring example for women everywhere. She chose a life of great simplicity and remained content with little in material and financial matters. This enabled her to benefit fully from her companionship with the Prophet. She devoted herself to learning the religion directly from him. As a result, after his death, she continued for many years to teach and guide others.

The same opportunity remains open to all women. Those

who adopt a simple way of life and devote themselves to acquiring religious knowledge may also receive God's help and become a source of blessing to others, just as Aisha was in her time. (*Al-Risala*, February 2008)



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021), an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader, and peace activist, was internationally recognized for his seminal contributions to world peace. The Government of India posthumously honoured him with the Padma Vibhushan Award in 2021 for his contributions to spirituality. Maulana authored over 200 books that delve into Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, its relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran and Tazkirul Quran Commentary are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. In 2001, he founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International to promote a culture of peace and convey the spiritual message of Islam at a global level. CPS International Network is taking the legacy forward.

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Aisha Siddiqah

Aisha Siddiqah holds a distinguished place in Islamic history as a woman of exceptional learning, intelligence and religious insight. Her close companionship with the Prophet enabled her to observe his life, understand his teachings and grasp their deeper wisdom. For nearly fifty years after his death, she remained an important source of prophetic knowledge, guiding others through her understanding of the Quran and Hadith. This book explores her intellectual development, her approach to religious questions, her clarification of Hadith reports and her lasting contribution to Islamic thought. Her life remains an inspiring example of learning, reflection, simplicity and dedication to God.



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