

Gardens of Paradise: Safiyyah bint Huyayy (ra): From a Household of Enmity to the Prophetic Household

(Translated)

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By Ustadh Abd al-Salam al-Badri

In Islam, lineage, race, and ancestral history carry no weight; true worth lies solely in Iman (faith) and in responding to the truth. This is the story of a woman whose life witnessed extraordinary events. She was the daughter of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, one of the most prominent leaders of Banu al-Nadir, and later became a wife of the Messenger of Allah (saw) and a Mother of the Believers. She is Safiyyah bint Huyayy (may Allah be pleased with her), who hailed from a household renowned for its hostility toward the house of prophethood.

Her father, Huyayy ibn Akhtab, was among the leaders of Banu al-Nadir and subsequently became one of the fiercest instigators of war against the Muslims. He strove to rally the Confederates (Al-Ahzab) against Al-Madinah and incited Banu Quraythah to breach their covenant with the Messenger of Allah (saw). However, Islam does not hold a person accountable for the sins of their father. Allah (swt) says, **وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ** “And no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another.” [TMQ Surah Al-An'aam: 164].

Thus, Safiyyah was neither responsible for her father's choices nor for the stance of her tribe; instead, she faced her own personal test: what would she do when the truth became clear to her? Here begins a magnificent story of divine guidance

Safiyyah Before Her Islam

Following the conquest of Khaybar, Safiyyah (ra) was taken captive. She possessed high nobility as the daughter of the chieftain of Banu al-Nadir. When the Prophet (saw) learned of her status, he honored her and gave her the choice to either remain upon her religion and be set free, or to embrace Islam and become his wife. She chose Islam and the Messenger of Allah (saw), whereupon he emancipated her, married her, and made her freedom her dowry (mahr). This account is authentically established in Sahih al-Bukhari.

Here we ought to pause and reflect deeply:

Safiyyah was not required to pay the price for her father's wrongdoing. She chose a new path for herself—the path of Iman. In this way, Islam teaches us that even if a person is born into an environment far removed from the truth, they possess the ability to choose the truth once they recognize it.

From Captivity to Dignity

The Prophet (saw) did not make Safiyyah's past or her lineage to his enemies a reason to demean her; rather, she (ra) became his wife and a Mother of the Believers. This stands as one of the greatest lessons in the Prophetic biography (seerah).

Islam never closes the door of guidance in anyone's face. A person may come from a household hostile to Islam and yet become from the people of Islam and an object of high honor. A father may tread one path while his child treads another, for the true criterion is righteousness and iman. Allah (swt) says, **إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ** “Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.” [TMQ Surah Al-Hujurat: 13].

Safiyyah (ra) in the Prophetic Household

Safiyyah (may Allah be pleased with her) entered the household of the Prophet (saw) and became one of the Mothers of the Believers. Jealousy among the Mothers of the Believers was a natural human inclination, yet the Prophet (saw) handled every situation with wisdom and compassion. Among the moving incidents was when Safiyyah (ra) felt hurt by remarks made regarding her ancestry. The Prophet (saw) comforted her and reminded her of her noble standing, saying to her, «إِنَّكَ لِبْنَةُ نَبِيٍّ، وَإِنَّ عَمَّكَ لَنَبِيٍّ، وَإِنَّكَ لَتَحْتُ نَبِيٍّ» **“Indeed, you are the daughter of a prophet (Musa (as)), your uncle is a prophet (Haroon (as)), and you are married to a prophet (Muhammad (saw)).”**

He (saw) then spoke words to her that dispelled the painful effect of those remarks. Thus, the Messenger of Allah (saw) preserved the dignity of his wives and never permitted jealousy to degenerate into injustice or humiliation.

Safiyyah... Wife of the Prophet (saw)

The Prophet (saw) treated Safiyyah (ra) with exemplary kindness and companionship. Among the illustrations of this is what Anas (ram) reported: the Prophet (saw) placed his cloak over the back of his camel for Safiyyah to mount, reflecting his mercy and gracious companionship. Likewise, when Safiyyah (ra) and his wife Zaynab (ra) stumbled, the Prophet (saw) said to them, «إِنَّكُمَا لِبَنَتَا نَبِيٍّ» **“Indeed, both of you are the daughters of a prophet.”**

In this lay the soothing of their hearts and the honoring of the members of his household.

An Incident Revealing the Greatness of the Character of the Prophet (saw)

Among the most beautiful incidents is what Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported: Safiyyah (ra) visited the Prophet (saw) while he was performing i'tikaf (retreat in the masjid). When he walked out with her to escort her back to her home, two men from the Ansar passed by. Upon spotting the Prophet (saw), they hastened their pace, whereupon he said to them, «عَلَى رِسْلِكُمَا، إِنَّهَا صَفِيَّةُ بِنْتُ حُيَيٍّ» **“Slow down; she is Safiyyah bint Huyayy.”**

He (saw) then stated, «إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَجْرِي مِنْ ابْنِ آدَمَ مَجْرَى الدَّمِ» **“Indeed, Satan flows through the human being like the circulation of blood.”**

The Prophet (saw) left no room for suspicion, nor did he say, “I am the Messenger of Allah, and it is people's duty to think well of me.” Instead, he taught the Ummah to safeguard honor, seal off the avenues of rumors and ill thoughts, and eradicate suspicion at its root.

What Do We Learn from Safiyyah (ra)?

First: Do not allow the past of your family to dictate your future

A person may be the offspring of a righteous man and yet stray, or be the child of a man far from the truth and yet find guidance. No one has the right to say, “I am like this because my father was like this,” nor should anyone judge a person on account of their father or tribe. Allah (swt) says, «كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ» **“Every soul is pledged for what it has earned.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Muddaththir: 38].

Second: When the truth becomes evident, the only proper stance is submission and response

Safiyyah (ra) did not allow tribal affiliation to act as a barrier between herself and the truth. This offers a vital lesson for every human being: whenever evidence from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (saw) becomes clear to a person, they must not prioritize custom, nationalism, political party, personal interest, or intellectual inheritance over it.

Third: Islam unifies people upon the Islamic creed ('Aqeedah)

Safiyyah (ra) came from a people who differed from the Muslims in religion, yet she ultimately became a Mother of the Believers. This demonstrates that the bond of Islam is far stronger than ties of blood, race, or tribe. Allah (swt) says, ﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ﴾ **“The believers are but brothers.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Hujurat: 10].

Fourth: It is impermissible to wrong a person because of their background or identity

Among the most dangerous errors is judging or holding a person accountable based on their tribe, family, or origin. Safiyyah (ra) serves as the clearest proof of this principle: her father was among the fiercest adversaries of the Muslims, yet she became one of the Mothers of the Believers. Thus, no innocent person should be punished for the crime of another.

Safiyyah Is Not Merely a Historical Tale

The story of Safiyyah (ra) is not simply an account of a woman whom the Messenger of Allah (saw) married. It is a story of divine guidance. It is the story of how an individual can break free from a specific environment and reach the truth; a story demonstrating that Islam does not view a person through the lens of tribalism, but through the lens of Iman; and a story showing that the Prophetic household was a sanctuary of mercy, dignity, education, and spiritual purification. For this reason, when we read, ﴿فَبِهَذَا هُمْ أَقْتَدَهُ﴾ **“So follow their guidance.”** [TMQ Surah Al-An'am: 90].

We ought not to read it as mere bygone history, but as an invitation to emulate the guidance borne by the Prophets and those who followed them.

Safiyyah Today... What Does She Tell Us?

She tells us: Do not follow the truth merely because your forebears followed it. Do not reject the truth simply because your opponents uttered it. Do not let tribal prejudice stand as a barrier between you and guidance. When the truth becomes manifest, be courageous in following it. When you come to know Allah, dedicate your ultimate loyalty to Him. When you come to know the Messenger of Allah (saw), follow his guidance. If someone from your family commits a wrong, do not bear the burden of their mistake. And if someone treats you ill, do not let their ill-treatment become a reason for abandoning the truth.

Safiyyah (ra) emerged from the household of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, yet she did not allow her father's stance to become her permanent destiny; rather, her life culminated in becoming a wife to the Messenger of Allah (saw) and a Mother of the Believers.

O seeker of the path of guidance: do not say where you came from, but look at where you are heading.

O bearer of the concern for Islam: never despair of people being guided, for a person you deemed far from the truth may come forth to be among the closest to Allah.

O seeker of exemplary role models: emulate the guidance of the Prophets, the sublime morals of the Messenger of Allah (saw), and the guidance, mercy, and justice he brought.

Allah (swt) says, ﴿لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا﴾ **“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah often.”** [Al-Ahzab: 21]

May Allah have mercy upon the Mother of the Believers, Safiyyah bint Huyayy (ra), and gather us with her in the Delightful Gardens of Jannah.