

To My Beloved Daughters

Mani and Iran

May They Grow In the Light of Fatima

In the Name of God

The Compassionate, the Merciful

To the spirit of my mother, Zahra, the mirror of humility, emotions, and chastity, for whom life was only sorrow, while her existence, for me, was all kindness.

The words you are about to read are from a lecture I gave at the Husayniyyeh Ershad. To begin with, I had wanted to comment upon the research of Professor Louis Massignon about the personality and complicated life of Fatima (‘a). I had wished to refer to the deep and revolutionary influence her memory evokes in Moslem societies, and the role she has played in the breadth of Islamic transformations. These words were, in particular, for the university students participating in my various classes: ‘History and Knowledge of Religions’, ‘The Sociology of Religions’, and ‘Islamology’.

As I entered the gathering, I saw that, in addition to the university students, many others had come. This spoke of the need for a more urgent response to the problem. I agreed to answer the pertinent question of womanhood which is extremely important today for our society.

Women who have remained in the ‘traditional mould’ do not face the problem of identity and women who have accepted the ‘new imported mould’ have solved the problem for themselves. But in the midst of these two types of ‘molded women’, there are those who can neither accept their hereditary, traditional form nor surrender to this imposed new form. What should they do?

They want to decide for themselves. They want to develop themselves. They need a model, an ideal example, a heroine. For them, the problem of ‘Who am I? How do I become?’ is urgent. Fatima, through her own ‘being’, answers their questions.

I would have been satisfied with giving an analytical description of the personality of Fatima. I found that book shops had no books about her and thus, our intellectuals know nothing about her life. I was obliged

to compensate for this lack to a certain extent. Thus this present essay, is the same lecture, but expanded to include a biography based upon documented, traditional sources about this beloved person, who has remained unknown or misinterpreted. In this bibliography, I particularly drew from historical documents. Whenever I reached a problem of faith and explicitly Shiite views, I chose Sunni sources, since Shi'ism grew out of the origins of Sunnism, and from the scholar's point of view, they are irrefutable.

I cannot say that this lecture is without need of criticism. Rather, the reverse is true. It is in great need –waiting for those with pure hearts, those who enjoy to guide, those who are willing to serve, rather than those who show hostility, abuse and make use of slander.

Ali Shariati

June, 1971

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