

Session Two: Conception and Pregnancy

From the Holy Qur'ân

19:22. *So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place*

19:23. *And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said: "Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!"*

19:24. *Then [a voice] cried unto her from below her, saying: "Grieve not! Your Lord has provided a water stream under you;*

19:25. *"And shake the trunk of date-palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe-dates upon you."*

19:26. *"So eat and drink and be glad, and if you see any human being, say: 'Verily! I have vowed a fast unto the Most Beneficent (Allâh) so I shall not speak to any human being this day.'"*

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23:12. *And indeed We created man (Adam) out of an extract of clay.*

23:13. *Thereafter We made him (the offspring of Adam) as a Nutfah (life germ) (and lodged it) in a safe lodging (womb of the woman).*

23:14. *Then We made the Nutfah into a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood), then We made the clot into a little lump of flesh, then We made out of that little lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then We brought it forth as another creation. So blessed be Allâh, the Best of creators.*

From Hadîth

The most terrifying moments for a human being are three:

- a) *at the time of birth, when he emerges from the womb of the mother and sees the world*
- b) *at the time of death, when he sees the hereafter and its people*
- c) *at the time when he is raised again, and sees laws that he had not seen in this world.*

Imam Ali Ar-Ridhâ (a)

For every tree there is a fruit, and the fruit of the heart is a child.

Holy Prophet (s)

It is from the good fortune of a man that he should have a child who resembles him; in his appearance, his character, and his nature.

Imam Muhammad al-Bâqir (a)

The inheritance that a believer leaves for Allah is a child who worships Him after him.

Imam Ja'far as-Sâdiq (a)

The first step in the creation of man refers to the state when the embryo in the womb is adjusted, though it is confined within three distinct kinds of coverings, and three kinds of darkness. The first being that of the outer wall, the second of the womb, and the third of

the placenta. This is a time when the embryo can neither manage its nutrition nor ward off any harm from itself.

The menstrual flow is diverted to serve him as nutriment, just as water carries nutriment to the plants. So this process goes on until such time as his constitution is perfected, the skin over his body gets tough enough to withstand the atmosphere – so that it does not receive any harm from the air – and his eyes get capacity to withstand light. When all this is accomplished, its mother gets labor pangs, which severely shake her to uneasiness, culminating in the birth of the infant.

Hadîth al-Muadhhal

Genetics and Islam

Mankind has known for a long time that one generation of human beings transfers its qualities and characteristics to the next generation. This is the law of inheritance that exists among living things, and is responsible for preserving the different types of living creatures in the world. This transfer of human characteristics is done through genes.

The effect of genes on the life of a human being is tremendous. A significant percentage of what the child will eventually become is inherited. The Holy Prophet (s) and Imams have alluded to this important issue, and have mentioned genes at a time when the world knew nothing about them. Imam Ali (a) has said: *Good and noble manners are the sign of noble genes.*

A child carries the genes of both parents. That is why Islam has stressed the importance of marrying into the right family. In spouse selection, consideration of the family is very important. Although one is not marrying the family there is no doubt that family genes will be transferred to the children. The Holy Prophet has said: *Marry into a virtuous family, for genes have effects.* He has also said: *Look very carefully as to where you are placing your child, because genes and hereditary qualities are transferred in a concealed and unintentional way, and have their effects.* According to the Holy Prophet (s), children often resemble their maternal uncles. He says: *Choose a suitable place for your [placing] sperm, for children often become similar to their maternal uncles.*

Sometimes a child is born with qualities that belong to neither parent. This new characteristic could be as a result of either: a) changing of the state of a gene, or b) a gene that has been transferred from an ancestor. A gene that has been dormant for a long time in the family can sometimes become active. The quality is seen in the child although none of the immediate family members possess it. This truth was told to Muslims by the Holy Prophet (s). According to a Hadîth of Imam Ja`far as-Sâdiq (a) a man told the Prophet about the child his wife had delivered. He said his wife was a good woman, but she had delivered a child who did not look like an Arab. The child was dark skinned, had wide lips and short curly hair. He resembled the people of Ethiopia. He declared that no-one in his family had such qualities. The Prophet (s) explained to him that there are many genes that can become active when a child is being formed. These genes can sometimes be from one's ancient ancestors. He said that from the genes of the man and his wives, which were very numerous, some existed, that were responsible for the particular qualities of the child.

Fortune and Misfortune in the womb of the Mother

Because of the intense importance of the effect of genes, much of the child's future is secured even before the child is born. Thus we have the important Hadith of the Prophet (s) which says: *Fortunate is the person who is fortunate in his mother's womb and unfortunate is the person who is unfortunate in his mother's womb.* It should be remembered however that the good fortune or bad fortune that a child receives while in the womb of the mother is of two types:

1. Qualities that are inherited and are part of the decree of the Almighty. In these equalities there can be no change later on.
2. Qualities that can be changed later in life due to environment and training. Some of the characteristics that a child inherits, whether good or bad, can be changed due to the effect of outside influences.

Thus the character of a person depends partly on inherited qualities over which there is no control, and partly on the environment over which there is some control. This control is in the hands of parents, teachers, family and friends, and the person himself. Sometimes a child is born into a virtuous and noble family, and inherits many of their noble qualities. Later on in life however, the influence of friends and outside immoral influences cause him to change, and the path of his life is transformed. Training – both good or bad - plays an important role in the life of a person, and can change what the person was born with. That is why the Holy Prophet (s) has said: *The fortunate one may sometimes become unfortunate, and the unfortunate one may sometimes become fortunate.*

The role of the mother in this part of a child's life - before birth - has been greatly emphasized in Islam. Before conception, she has an equal role with the man. She provides the egg, while the man provides the sperm. After that, for nine months, the mother provides a nurturing place for the embryo to grow. It is in the womb of the mother that the egg grows into a small human being, that it is endowed with all the qualities and characteristics which make it a human being. All the detailed peculiarities of an individual child are formed while in the womb of the mother. More human development takes place in the womb than there ever will be in the life span of the human.

Aghae Falsafi, in his book *Kudakan* asks why the Prophet (s) mentions the womb of the mother as a cause of good or bad fortune in the above Hadith, and does not say anything about the father's sperm. He answers by saying that undoubtedly the role of the mother is much greater. After conception, the father has little to do with what affects the baby before birth. It is the mother who now affects the child, with all the physical and psychological attributes that she can provide. During pregnancy, the child depends on her for physical nourishment, and is also affected by her psychological well being.

Care during Pregnancy

From the time the baby is conceived until the time it is born, the womb of the mother is its home. It receives nutrition from the mother, and is sheltered from outside forces by the womb. Many of the factors that affect the mother now affect the child also.

The mother affects the fetus in her womb through two ways:

1. Physical and physiological factors:

The mother affects the child through food, drugs, sickness, blood pressure, size, age, etc. One of the factors that affect the growth of the baby is the food that a woman eats. Inadequate nutrition is deemed the greatest potential threat to optimum development of the child. Complications arising from lack of good nutrition include; general physical weakness, mental deficiency, susceptibility to illness and disease, speech defects, etc. It is desirable for a woman to begin her pregnancy in a healthy and well nourished state. It is difficult to suddenly correct dietary habits. A mother who already has good stores of essential nutrients like calcium, is better able to take care of her baby's needs than one who after becoming pregnant needs to take extra amounts of calcium.

According to Hadith, a woman must eat well during pregnancy to enhance the health and physical appearance of her child. Lack of essential nutrients could result in slowing the development of the child. The Ma'sumîn (a) have mentioned that it is desirable for a woman to eat more fruits and vegetables. Specific mention is made of dates. A Hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says: *A woman must eat dates during the month in which she will give birth, for that will make her child forbearing, pious.* Islam also advises healthy eating for all, and if women follow the teachings of the Ma'sumîn (a) on eating and drinking, there is no doubt that they will be able to provide adequate nutrition for their babies.

2. Mental and Emotional factors

The emotions of a mother also affect the child. Negative emotions such as increased levels of stress, anger, being upset and unhappy for a long time, being intensely frightened, jealousy, hatred etc. all affect both the mother and the child. The body becomes sick and distressed due to intense negative emotions. This distress is passed into the blood which are then conveyed to the baby through the placenta. Research has shown that stress in the earlier stages of pregnancy may result in physical abnormalities, while stress in the later stages of pregnancy results in behavioral changes. Emotional disturbances in mothers have also been linked to babies who are irritable, cry excessively or have feeding problems. Although it may not be possible to remain stress free for nine months, a mother should try and avoid stress as much as possible, especially prolonged stress.

It is beneficial for the mother to think positive thoughts during pregnancy. Pure and virtuous thoughts through worship, reciting of the Holy Qur'ân and Du'âs, reading religious material, learning about the lives of great Islamic leaders, help to create an increased sense of piety and connection to God. This is in turn transferred to the child. Such a state also calms the woman, gives her a sense of peace and tranquility, and enables her to prepare for the important role of motherhood. Thus a believing woman must use the months of pregnancy to prepare for the spiritual as well as the physical growth of the baby. It is also recommended to look at beautiful scenery, enjoy greenery and fresh air, and ponder over the vast skies.