

# Infertility in the Qur'an

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The Qur'an is true guidance for all mankind, complete and lacking nothing. It touches on every aspect of life, infertility is on the vast array of topics. The Qur'an teaches in many ways, showing us a glimpse of the lives of others before us is one way. There are two main stories of infertility which we should draw and learn from. The first story is that of Ibrahim s.a.w.. and his wife Sara r.a. There are two main accounts of this story, given as follows.

And his wife was standing (there) and she laughed:

*"But We gave her glad tidings of Isaac and after him, of Jacob." She said "Alas for me! Shall I bear a child, seeing I am an old woman, and my husband here, is an old man? That indeed would be a wonderful thing!" They said: "Dost thou wonder at Allah's decree? The grace of Allah and His blessings on you, O ye people of the house! For He is indeed worthy of all praise, full of Glory!" [Qur'an 11:71-73]*

*"...And they (angels) gave him (Ibrahim) glad tidings of a son endowed with knowledge. But his wife came forward clamoring, she smote her forehead and said: "A barren old woman!" They said "Even so has thy Lord spoken and He is full of wisdom and knowledge." [Qur'an 51:28-30]*

Not much detail is given in the Qur'an concerning the lives of Sara or Hagar. Much of the detail comes to us through the narration of Hadith. And Islamic exegesis also rely on Biblical (OT) information about Sara. What we do know from the Qur'an was that Sara was old and barren when Allah blessed her with a child. Exegesis placed her age at about ninety, while Ibrahim was over 100 yrs. old. Long before this

Sara gave her hand maiden, Hagar, to Ibrahim in marriage so that he may have children. Many women going through infertility can relate to the sense of guilt for "denying" their husbands children. This is a common feeling that is present, as we see with Sarah.

The story goes that after Hagar conceived she became "haughty" in her ability to have children, and Sarah's inability at that point. From this rose a jealousy in Sara in which she threatened to do harm to Hagar. Nothing came of this threat and evidently the waters were calmed in Ibrahim's household. The family continued to remain together until Ibrahim's command to take Hagar and Ishmael to the valley of Mecca and leave them there.

We have reference in the Qur'an of Sara striking her face and laughing in the astonishment of being blessed with a pregnancy at 90 yrs. of age. It appears Sarah, naturally, had long since given up hope of conceiving. She had given Hagar to Ibrahim as a way not to deny him and personally accepting the *Qadar* (fate) that Allah had set for her. In this we can take a lesson from Sara, at some point we must learn to just accept what has been written for us and go on. All too often couples become obsessed with having a child to where it is harmful for themselves. We as Muslims must learn to seek the balance of a healthy striving for pregnancy and knowing when to stop striving. A woman's (or man's) life does not end because they have no children. Sarah, although barren, remained firm in her faith, true to her husband, and a full woman in all senses of the word. It was written for Sarah that she would bare a son and live to see her grandchild. It is said she conceived Ishaq on the night when lots of people were destroyed (the angels where on their way

there). And she delivered Ishaq on a Friday night.

We should also take notice at the example set by Ibrahim responding to his barren wife. He was not harsh to his wife even though she was unable to conceive. Nor did he abandon her, he stood by his wife as she stood by him. He did not seek out another wife or "right hand possession" to have children, it was Sara who suggested Hagar to him. This bond of marriage, faith, love, and tenderness kept this couple together even in infertile times. Working together in cooperation in the process, something we all should take notice of. And men, or cultures for that matter, who blame women for not conceiving and dumb them as if they were no longer a complete woman should take heed in this example set by Ibrahim. **"Ibrahim was indeed a model..."** [Qur'an 16:120]

Another Quranic example of infertility is that of Zakariya and his wife Ishba. The story focuses more on Zakariya than Ishba herself. In fact very little is said about her in the Qur'an, hadith, and exegesis. There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: *"O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer! While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah, and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet, of the (goodly) company of the righteous."* He said: *"O my Lord! How shall I have son, seeing I am very old, and my wife is barren?"* *"Thus,"* was the answer, *"Doth Allah accomplish what He willeth."* [Qur'an 3:38-40]

(This is) a recital of the Mercy of thy Lord to His servant Zakariya. Behold! he cried to his Lord in secret, Praying: *"O my Lord! infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee!"* [Qur'an 19:2-4]

*"And (remember) Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: "O my Lord! leave me not without offspring, though thou art the best of inheritors." So We listened to him: and We granted him Yahya: We cured his wife's (Barrenness) for him. These (three) were ever quick in emulation in good works; they used*

*to call on Us with love and reverence, and humble themselves before Us.* [Qur'an 21:89-90]

Mary r.a. was placed in the care of Zakariya and her aunt Ishba. Ishba was barren, so the caring of a child was a blessing in her family. Zakariya at times marveling at how well Mary had grown appears to have instilled the urge in him to have a son. One who would not only inherit the family lineage, but one who would carry on the teachings of Allah, something which he did himself. Perhaps Mary r.a. fulfilled the natural urge in Zakariya to have children for a limited time, but when she had matured and no longer a child, the desire seems to have rekindled. Whatever the exact emotions that Zakariya had, he prayed in secret to have a son.

Zakariya beseeched Allah for this blessing, perhaps not expecting the answer, he appears surprised with it. Perhaps it was not so much the answer of "yes" but rather the means in which the child would come to him. His old barren wife, cured by Allah, was to conceive. Zakariya responded in natural amazement that his wife would conceive. He was told by Allah that such a thing was easy for Allah.. and it is. His son would be given the name of Yahya a name not before given. Ishba and Mary were pregnant during the same time, six months being the difference.

As with the story of Ibrahim we have the example of a husband who remains with his barren wife. She is not shunned, shamed, divorced, or looked down upon as an incomplete woman. As many men and cultures do to women in present times. This is a lesson that all of our ummah must learn, as Allah says *"...He leaves barren whom He wills"* [Qur'an 42:50] It is a decree from Allah. This does not make one less of a woman (or man) and one should not be treated as such. We are to remain firm in our faith in Allah, knowing that He brings about things that we may not like, thinks we are tested with. And it appears with the stigma placed on couples who do not have children that we are failing His test.

I know many women are thinking, that these two stories have such happy endings (babies) and yet it does not happen with all of us. Why does not Allah bestow on all of us pregnancies . . . why must "I" be barren . . . why me? As I sit here and write this, my

mind searches for an example of a woman with no children. Suddenly I remembered one so full of faith . . . one which is mentioned in the Qur'an as an example for those who believe

And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh: "*Behold she said: "O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong."*" [Qur'an 66:11]

Her name was Asya, and she never conceived a child. It is said that her marriage was one of sacrifice that she made for the safety of her people. But the marriage was never consummated, for Allah had stricken Pharaoh with impotence. Whatever the case may have been, here was a childless woman, who is set forth as an example for all believers. She nurtured a Prophet from infancy even though he was not her own, and she was a martyr. It is said that Pharaoh had killed several believers in the palace, among them a maid, her children and her husband. Asya picked up an iron stake to kill Pharaoh, she failed, and Pharaoh had her tortured by piercing iron stakes through her breast. The same childless woman sought Allah to build mansions in the Garden, and to save her from those that do wrong. Do we dare to say that such an example as stated by Allah is an incomplete or less of a woman because she bore no children? Do we not take heed in the examples given to us? So anytime one attempts to make you feel low, or less of a woman (or man) think of these examples, draw guidance and strength from them. Rely on Allah, and ask Him to give you strength. May Allah give us All that is good for us, make it easy for us to obtain it and keep us on the straight path when we do.

#### **References:**

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