

Inspirational Women: Interview with Mrs. Shaheen Usmani

There are few religious scholars more well-known in the Muslim world than Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani. His expertise in *fiqh* and *hadith*, and in particular his specialization in Islamic Finance, allows him to serve as a distinguished member on numerous international bodies of Islamic law. For scholars of such caliber, one rarely if ever hears about the internal happenings of their domestic life. And due to the emphasis on the modest and hidden nature of a woman's private sphere, one rarely hears directly from the female members of such religious households.

For this reason, the interview we share below is a real jewel. We see in the frank and confident discourse of Mrs. Shaheen Usmani the experience of a human being who has willfully served Allah throughout her life. She is not shy to admit that from the start of her marriage, she has intended the pleasure of God in all that she does. By the *baraka* of this intention, one finds in her story the account of a real, contemporary life full of love, companionship, and deep contentment.

There is something magnificent found in reading about her daily routine, something precious in the minor details of her interactions with people. Not only can one perceive the deep respect she has for her spouse, one can also tell in her words the love and appreciation her husband must hold for her. There are myriad lessons in her brief interview for both Muslim men and women: from the importance of keeping to a schedule, to showing consideration for one's spouse even when one is laden with other responsibilities, to the need for physically sitting together with those one loves on a regular basis.

Mrs. Usmani's active pursuit of knowledge, and her desire to benefit women around her, is inspiring as well. Her idea to gather one's neighbors and read out of a reliable text combines both personal initiative as well as reliance on scholarly authorities at one and the same time. Practicality, wisdom, and sincerity to Allah can be seen throughout this interview transcript, *mashaAllah tabarakAllah*. We hope that our readers here at Sila will benefit from reading and reflecting on it.

We would like to thank whoever it was who originally conducted the interview in Urdu and transcribed it into English. The version we are sharing below is taken

from: http://www.daruliftaa.com/mtu_wife_interview. The only edit the Sila Initiative has made is to use her full name, with her permission.

Question: Shaykh Mufti Taqi Usmani has spent his entire life in the service of Islam with constant effort and hard work. To achieve so much Masha Allah, he must have a support system at home. Can you kindly share with us how you help him out?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: Since the very first day of our marriage, I decided - with the intention of earning reward - that I will take up all household responsibilities in a manner so that Shaykh can fully concentrate on the work of deen. This way, I

[hope to] get a share in the reward of his religious efforts as well. To this end, I not only try to contribute to the religious environment of the house (e.g. by not involving him in vain conversations), but also give him no trouble regarding household affairs, ranging from arranging groceries to buying personal items such as clothes etc. I try to resolve all big and small household issues on my own; for example, getting a broken phone stand repaired. Even when the children were small, I would try to make sure that Shaykh is not disturbed by routine issues related to them.

I would also like to mention here that I have been blessed by Allah Most High with one of the most considerate of spouses, who has always provided me with the best of worldly and religious environment at home. I feel total bliss, Al-hamdulillah.

Question: Shaykh travels abroad very frequently. Did you get chances to travel with him? If yes, how do you keep yourself occupied when he is busy in official meetings / work etc?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: I travel very frequently with Shaykh. In fact, I have accompanied him on many foreign tours. Usually, as we board the plane, he begins work on his laptop and keeps working until the plane lands at the destination. In the meantime, I get myself busy in completing my daily recitations (ma'mulat/wird) during the course of the journey. At the hotel, Shaykh proceeds to his official engagements and I open up the Holy Qur'an for recitation, reading [also] the translation, etc. Actually, I love reading. At home, since one is busy with

household affairs, one does not get enough time to read with concentration. So on these travels; I fulfill my desire of reading [with concentration]. Recently, I was trying to learn Arabic, so I would open up my Arabic books and try to study. When Shaykh would come to the room for lunch, I would show him about something I didn't understand.

I am not too fond of outings or shopping, so even with many ladies offering to show me around the town, I prefer to stay at the hotel and follow my routine. At Fajr time, Shaykh and I always go for a half hour walk together, no matter where we are. In the evening, even when I am at home, I complete my evening half hour walk on a treadmill while reciting at least one Juz of the Holy Qur'an.

On foreign tours, after the official work has finished, Shaykh many times adds an extra day to the trip for my sake to show me different sites and places in the city.

Question: When the children grow up, the ladies of the house get some extra time to spend as they like. How do you utilize that time and how do you spend your average day?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: Every Thursday, I deliver a talk for the female teachers and staff of the Hira Foundation School [the hybrid school offering the Cambridge education system along with religious learning within Dar-ul-Uloom Karachi premises], where I read from Shaykh's [book] *Islahi Khutbat*. I also frequently make surprise visits to the school to check up on its work.

As far as my daily routine is concerned (which is aligned with that of Shaykh's, to give him maximum comfort), it mostly goes like this: After Fajr, we go for a walk together; then we have breakfast at 7:30am. Shaykh then proceeds to his 8.00 to 10.00am class to teach *Sahih al-Bukhari*, while I get busy in household chores. He comes home at 10.00am, and until 12 noon works on his laptop [writing books, etc]. 12.00 to 2.00pm are his office hours, so he proceeds there. After Zuhr prayers, we have our lunch together at around 2.15pm, and then rest for half to one hours (till around 3.30pm). [From 3.30pm till Asr, he goes back to his office where teachers, students and others have an opportunity to consult with him]. Asr to Maghrib prayers is family time. Shaykh is very particular that we all sit together at this time and discuss any issues of interest. From Maghrib to Isha, he proceeds to do his own work e.g. if he is working on a book, then writing, researching for it etc. After dinner, we all sit down for 10-15 minutes, where

Shaykh reads out from a book. The grandchildren must also attend this reading session. After this, he again gets back to work before retiring to bed at 12.00 midnight.

Question: What needs to be done to further our work for the reformation efforts directed towards women?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: First of all, more and frequent lecture gatherings must be held for ladies, where discourses of our pious predecessors are read out. The more ladies listen to these, the more impact it would have; not only bringing about a gradual change in them, but they would also be able to positively impact their children and household.

Secondly, our approach to reformation should not be an offensive or even direct one; we should not be scolding the other as it would only irritate the listener, and instead of accepting the good advice, she may become reactionary. We should indirectly try to make people understand about prevalent vices by frequently inviting them over to religious gatherings. As an example, if a lady is busy in rearing up children at home and is interested in da'wah work or feels pain at something that her next door neighbour might be doing incorrectly, she should take out just 15-20 minutes out of her schedule, invite her neighbour and another one or two ladies to her place for an informal gathering where she can read out a few pages from a book of a pious predecessor. In this way, the neighbour will get to know the correct approach in a subtle and indirect manner. Even though this effort seems insignificant, but it will, insha' Allah, have a huge impact if done regularly over a period of time - just like trickling drops of water impact a hard rock over time.

We as ladies should also remember to teach our children acts of Sunna and Prophetic (masnun) duas from a very young age. It will help develop their habit of following the Sunna, and we would be able to contribute towards their positive upbringing in a very meaningful manner.

To make our advice to others more effective, it is always good to make dua first. Whenever I am to speak at any forum, I always offer two units of Salat al-Hajah (Prayer of Need) to make the effort beneficial for both myself and the listeners.

Question: In these unsettling times where separations are rife, is there any particular advice [for women] that you consider important for a happy and

successful marriage?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: One thing which I think is vital for wives, especially these days, is to be sensitive to the likes and dislikes of their husbands. It is common knowledge that women generally dress up (in their best clothes), put on perfume, don make-up and look their best when they go out, but at home they remain dressed ragged or in very plain clothes, without being even slightly made-up, with whiffs of the kitchen surrounding them. It should be the other way around, in that while going out, ladies should dress simply and be in Hijab. This would create a very healthy environment.

Question: Which of Shaykh's habits do you like most?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: (Laughingly) All! Masha Allah. In fact, my relatives joke with me that we have never seen a wife listen so intently to her husband's discourses. We have been, Masha Allah, blessed with a wonderful companionship by Allah Most High. It is the fruit of trying to do everything for each other with the intention of earning reward.

Question: What does Shaykh prefer in food?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: He really likes plain mutton gravy and daal mash.

Question: These days, we are surrounded by all kinds of vices - for one, there is a fully fledged media attack. To top it, Muslims themselves are inclined towards non-Islamic rituals and practices e.g. non-Islamic rites at weddings, non-observance of Hijab, extravagance, haram sources of income etc. How do we protect ourselves and our children in such an environment and how do we inculcate self-confidence in children when they are to swim against the tide?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: I think the most important thing to do at such times is to keep the household environment healthy and safe. If the home atmosphere is Islamic, where children are trained according to religious injunctions and are taught about the rights and wrongs in a proper manner, Insha'Allah, they will remain safe when they step out. When all members of the house pray regularly, fast and remain busy in Dhikr, Allah Most High protects them from attacks of Satan. And the most critical role in this training is that of the mother. If the lady of the house wishes, she can change the entire environment of her home.

On one of our visits to England, we came across a Muslim community whose children knew more Prophetic (masnun) duas than many Pakistani children, whose young girls observed proper Hijab and all the elders were Masha Allah following the injunctions of Islam including prayers at the mosque and adorning the proper Islamic dress. When asked how they could maintain such a lifestyle in an open environment such as in the UK, they simply replied that they had kept their home environments intact. Thus, the children remained insulated from external deviating pressures. So, it is a matter of will really. Islam is as practicable today, in the prevalent environment, as it was in yesteryears. If we want to follow it comprehensively, we need to have a firm and sincere intention to do so. The rest is made easy by Allah Most High.

Question: What would you like to say to the readers of our magazine, especially young females who are becoming increasingly aware of their religious obligations but face peer pressure or even resistance at home?

Mrs. Shaheen Usmani: They should try their utmost to attend religious gatherings and read books of our pious predecessors. The more they do so, the easier and quicker would be their transformation process, Insha'Allah. If a girl decides to bring about a change in her life and remains steadfast and resolved, no one can come in her way. In fact, the members of her household would also gradually start noticing the positive changes in her and might all come around to the complete Islamic way of life too, Insha'Allah.

Jazakillah for giving your time and sharing your valuable views with us.