

Module 4

Class Title: Heroes & Stars – Part 2 –Asma binte Abi-Bakr (ra)
(2nd part of a 3 lesson series)

Aim of Lesson: To appreciate the importance of *sahaba* as our role-models.

Category:

Class Format: Narration & Discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*
(*Ta'awwudh*) *Aoodhubillahi min As Shaytanir Rajeem*
(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*
(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*
(Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28)

Do you remember Heroes & Stars, the class that we did a couple of weeks ago? We are going to do a carry on from that class and this time we will talk about women.

I thought it would be more interesting as we have so many young women here. First of all, tell me what defines a successful woman? Who do you think is a successful woman? What qualities should she have? That's right; she should be educated, well mannered, creative, confident, smart. She should have drive, power, motivation and passion for what she wants to do.

You need to be passionate about what you want. You can't just do something and be good at it unless you like what you are doing. You must have all these qualities as they are very important aspects of being a woman who succeeds in life and gets what she wants.

Let's watch a video.

(Note to teacher: play video – Edward Bernays and Big Tobacco's "Torches of Freedom" from youtube)

Did you understand that? There was a taboo at that time about women smoking; women never smoked, only women of loose character smoked; those who were socially unacceptable. The majority of the women would never dream of lighting up a cigarette. So the tobacco companies wanted to come up with some way of getting the female fifty percent of the population to start smoking.

This man Edward Bernays came up with the idea that on the Easter Day Parade in New York, which thousands of people would be watching, these rich debutantes would strap cigarettes on their thighs. At a signal from him they took out their cigarettes and lit them up, all of them at the same time. Earlier, he had informed all the photographers and reporters that this group of women "suffragettes", the freedom fighters for women's

votes, would be lighting cigarettes and these would signify the lighting of the torches of freedom. This was the phrase that they had coined; “Torches of freedom”. It was not just a cigarette; if you lit it up, that cigarette was a torch of freedom for women’s rights. With just that one master stroke, that taboo got lifted because obviously, the next day it was plastered all over in the newspapers and within a week women in America were smoking.

Now the thing to analyse is that what did these women think they were doing by lighting up their cigarettes? They were fighting for women’s rights. They were fighting for freedom of choice, by choosing to smoke. Isn’t that so? Actually, what had actually happened? It was not the women’s decision to start smoking was it? It was the tobacco companies’ decision. It was Edward Bernays who didn’t give two hoots about the health of the women who were smoking or the fact that they should have the freedom of choice. He just wanted to maximize their profits. It all boiled down to profits. Do you see how skillfully they manipulated all those women? They brain washed them into thinking that they were being so cool and they were fighting for women’s rights by smoking.

This is how important it is to realize that being emancipated is not doing what everybody else is doing, not dressing the way they are dressing, not smoking a cigarette. Dressing up in size zero clothes, that is not being emancipated.

Being emancipated means to choose to live your life the way you want to live it, not the way the popular image is. Not the way people generally feel they should live their lives.

There was a study about a group of teenagers in university; you know that university students have no uniform, they may dress as they please. When I tell you that they were a group of teenagers, how would you visualize them? What would they be wearing? That’s right, jeans! Jeans and tops, with sneakers or pumps. Maybe shoulder bags if they were girls or backpacks. We all have a certain image of a class of teenagers that comes to mind, right? When these teenagers were questioned as to why they were dressed the way they were dressed, half of them said that they dress this way because they liked it. But the other half said that they dressed like that to conform, to be part of the group.

This is an age where we supposedly enjoy the most freedom, we have the most knowledge. We have the ipad, the iphone, the computer and the internet because of which you can access any information you want to. YET, they were conforming; they wanted to do what everybody else was doing, so that they remain a part of that herd.

Think about it yourself, when you are going to a party and you are at your friends’ houses, mostly all the girls dress alike. When you walk in to a party, there will be very few girls who’ll stand out and be wearing something different. They will all be wearing those jersey tops and leggings or jeans; they all stand sideways while having their photographs taken. That’s odd though, because women generally like to stand out; they want to be noticed. When you go to a party and your friend tells you that she is going to

wear her pink top and you have the something very similar, would you wear that same pink top? No. You'll change it immediately because you want to be different.

The liberated woman thinks for herself. She weighs the pros and cons and then she makes her choice. She knows that a woman can affect a lot of people with her choices; as a sister, a wife, as a daughter, but most of all as a mother.

A mother is a very powerful person but how does a mother change? The hands that rock the cradle rule the world! You must have heard of that. It's true. The principles and values that a mother instills in children are carried along with them all their life. They will be the commanders, leaders and officers of tomorrow; they will be the heads of companies and whenever they go out in the world, they will be leading a lot of people. If they have been taught the right values and the correct things to do, they will be decent human beings who will be productive and care for their country. They will not lie and cheat, or do things the wrong way and just think about their personal benefits. If their upbringing lacks, they will only think about themselves.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what's happening in our country these days; everybody is thinking about themselves, with the result that we are where we are, in Pakistan. Most of our leaders, now that they are in powerful positions, are making all the wrong choices. A lot of them are working very hard and they are doing the right thing. But many are doing a lot of wrong things and we know that. Even you know about it, as children because everybody talks about it. Maybe their mothers chose to give to them those values. Or maybe those mothers didn't have good values themselves.

So you have to understand that it all boils down to the choices you make. The choice you make about which path you will follow. Do you think lighting those torches was the correct choice for those women? Why not? That's right; because they were doing it just because they thought they were being cool and they were fighting for their rights. But it was the wrong choice because we know that smoking leads to lung cancer. Smoking is very bad for the health. But at that time they just lit the cigarettes because it was the hip thing to do.

So what happened when the children of that generation grew up seeing both their parents smoking? The majority of them turned out to be smokers as well. By the time they realized that smoking leads to lung cancer and many health problems, it was too late. Smoking is very addictive and once you get into the habit, you are a smoker for life. It's very difficult to break out of that addiction. That whole generation was lost in a way, because with their smoking they have many serious health issues.

If the woman makes a wrong choice it can be a very serious matter, because when a mother goes off track, the whole family will follow. They all quietly go the wrong way and that choice will reverberate through ages; it's like a ripple effect. You throw a

pebble in the pond and the ripple keeps getting wider and wider and wider. You have to be careful about not being brainwashed into doing what is actually not good for you.

Islam actually empowers women; this is something that we are brainwashed against. The images of *chadar* (large shawl) and *chahardawari* (four enclosed walls) and women being locked up inside; they don't go out and can't do anything. That's the image the whole world has of Muslim women. But that's not true. Islam really empowers you; it gives you lots of freedom and rights which were never there before its time. In fact such rights are not given to women even today, despite all the liberation and all that they have achieved. Not in the West, not in the East, not anywhere.

People from the west and people from other religions are happy to promote this image of Islam; that women in Islam will be locked away. They brain wash women into fighting against it. They project this as a problem by portraying that Muslim women cannot go out of the house and have to be covered up all the time.

However, there are many very productive women who do *purdah* (*hijab*); who wear the *chadar* and yet have accomplished a lot. Even you must know a lot of women like that. Maybe a lot of your mothers do *purdah*; they wear an *abaya* or a coat and scarf. Has that affected their capabilities in any way? They have accomplished a lot, haven't they? Wearing a *chadar* and wearing an *abaya* doesn't cut off your hands and switch off your brains. You just carry on doing it because it does not hinder you; it just helps to free you because you have chosen to wear something. You have chosen to be a Muslim woman.

Let us ok look at one special Muslim lady: Asma binte Abi bakr (ra). She was one of the most celebrated Muslim women of that time. Do you know who I'm talking about? Yes, she was the eldest daughter of Abu Bakr Siddiq (ra) and A'isha (ra) was her sister.

She was one of the earliest people to accept Islam. They say that she was the eighteenth person to become a Muslim. She was there right from the beginning and she had a very long life. She lived to be a hundred years old. She saw Islam from its humble beginnings and how it rose to being a very powerful.

Asma (ra) was a lady of great determination. She accepted Islam whole heartedly and after that she devoted her life and all of her capabilities towards the success of the Islamic cause. I'll just take some extracts from her life because we can't go through the whole hundred years.

You know that after a certain time period the Prophet (pbuh) migrated from Makkah to Madina and it was a very dangerous period of time because the Quraysh wanted to kill the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr (ra). All the planning for the migration had taken place in the house of Abu Bakr (ra) and there were just a few people who knew of the plan; it was a very closely guarded secret. Asma (ra) was one the very few people who knew

about the plan; in fact she was one of the key members. She was a young woman at that time, but no one doubted her capabilities.

The Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr left Makkah and took refuge in *Ghar-e-Thaur*. They went and hid there for three days. She had given them food and water but she had to go and give news of what was happening in Makkah and bring them more food and water for their long journey because Madina was a long way off.

I don't know how many of you have been there; have any of you been for 'Umrah? Have you seen the *Ghar e Thaur*? It's very high up in the hills! She had to do it in a way that no one's attention was drawn, and she had to dodge the Quraysh and their allies, who were hunting the Prophet (pbuh) high and low.

When she got there with their food and water, she realized that she had forgotten some rope to tie it to the horse or the camel that they were going to take. She was a very fast thinker and she quickly took off her belt; you know that they used to wear these long dresses, robes and they had belts around their waists. That's the belt she took off and she used it to tie up the food. Her father suggested that she tear it in half, so she tore it up and tied the water with one half and the food with the other half. This was a great testimony to her abilities because she didn't waste time by fretting. She used her common sense, got on her feet and solved the dilemma; since that day she was nick-named *dhun-nattiqeen* Because "*nitaq*" is the Arabic name for the waistband that the women used to tie on their clothes, which she had used to help the Prophet (pbuh).

After the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr (ra) escaped and the *Quraysh* realized that they had lost them, Abu Jahl, one of the greatest enemies of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), was furious. He also knew that Abu Bakr (ra) was one of Prophet's (pbuh) closest friends so his family must know something about the plan. He went to Asma's (ra) house and asked her where the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr (ra) had gone. She denied having any knowledge so he asked her again. Then he was so enraged that he slapped her so hard that her earring flew out of its lobe. Yet she continued saying that she didn't know their whereabouts. Thus we see how very courageous she was as well; she didn't get intimidated by him or his fury.

At that time her grandfather, the father of Abu Bakr (ra), was old and blind; his name was Abu Ruhafa. He had not become a Muslim till then. After few days he came over to their house and said that he had heard that Abu Bakr (ra) had left without giving Asma (ra) any money and had abandoned his family. This was because Abu-Bakr (ra) converted all his property, all his wealth into cash before he left Makkah; the amount which he took with him came to about 6000 dirham. This was a lot of money at that time. He took it all with him. He did not leave anything behind because he knew that they would need a lot of money in Madina; Muslims who were migrating there needed a lot of help. Abu Bakr's

family also accepted his decision and did not complain or protest against this sacrifice. They accepted it because this is what had to be done for Islam. Thus when Asma's grandfather enquired if they had been abandoned by Abu Bakr (ra), she reassured him that there was no such problem. In fact she led him to a shelf where she had covered some pebbles with a piece of cloth and made him run his hand over them and told him that it was the money that was left behind for them. Then he was reassured.

Why do you think she did that? After all, he was her grandfather; he was concerned about them. Why do you think she didn't tell him the truth? Because she didn't want to worry him; she wanted to reassure him out of loyalty to her father and also because she did not want to accept anything from an idol worshipper. See he was still not a Muslim at that time.

That is how important Islam was to them. Once Islam was part of their lives, it was the most important thing. She did not want to tell him the truth because if he had known, he would certainly have given them something. He was their grandfather and he was worried about them. But she didn't want to take anything from him.

Later she was married to Zubayr (ra). He was one of the *'ashara-e mubashshireen*. They are the ten blessed companions who were given the news of their going to Paradise while they were still alive. He was one of the *sahaba* and he was greatly loved by the Prophet (pbuh). He was not very rich at that time; in fact he was quite poor. They had no servants at all. Asma (ra) helped her husband in all of his affairs. Their relationship was not like one between a master and a servant; she helped him with all his affairs.

She was the daughter of a well off man and had been brought up in a certain style and a certain level of comfort. Abu Bakr (ra) was a man of means and she had been brought up in that comfort. Then she was married to Zubayr (ra) who had nothing. However, she happily did everything for him; she helped him, she worked with him and she did it all because money was not important to her.

Later in life they did become very rich; Allah (swt) gave them a lot of money and they were very well off. But even then, she carried on her life the way it was. She continued her work like before because their financial status was unimportant to her. Wealth is not a goal for a Muslim; the 'Be all and the end all'. If you have it that's great because you can use it to do Allah's (swt) work. I don't mean you can do good only if you're poor. You can be wonderful people and yet be very rich. But that depends on how you use your wealth.

Once Asma (ra) became rich she didn't become arrogant and develop an attitude problem which we see in a lot of rich people today. They think that they have so much and everybody should be in awe of them and they should bow down to them. Just because she

had maid servants to serve her and riches to her disposal, she didn't change her attitude. She carried on doing the house work, she carried on doing her chores.

Do you do any house work? On the weekends maybe, making your bed, doing the dusting? Do you ever think that the maid is tired and you should do a little bit for her? It's very easy. It doesn't take very long to make your bed or to do the dusting, even of your own bedroom. At least on weekends you can do that.

So what qualities of Asma (ra) do we know now? Quickly! Loyal, confident, strong, sincere, determined, efficient. See how many qualities she had? They were amongst the last people to migrate to Madina and at that time she was even pregnant. It was a very long and difficult journey from Makkah to Madina; and you know that she wasn't going to sit in a car and be driven there on a very good highway. They had to walk all that way and whatever they could carry, were the only things they were taking. But again she didn't let these difficulties become obstacles for her. She could have said I'll wait until I've had the baby and the baby is a little older. She didn't say that! She knew that this had to be done and she went ahead. Normally, what do we do when we are faced with some difficult situation? We say we'll take care of it later, some other day; but she didn't do that.

When she got to Madina, her son was born in Quba, where the mosque was. He was also the first child to be born to the *muhajirin* (immigrants) in Madina, so everybody was very happy. She named her son Abdullah. Do you know what the meaning of Abdullah is? Allah's slave. It was just that, she was trying to please Allah (swt) all the time, and she even kept her son's name Abdullah.

She was an extremely generous person and her son Abdullah said that after he grew up, he had never seen two women more generous than his aunt A'isha (ra), and his mother Asma (ra). But their generosity was expressed in different ways; his aunt would accumulate things one after the other and when she would feel she had gathered enough things she would give them away. His mother on the other hand, would not keep anything even for the next day. Whatever she had, she would just distribute to people who were needy.

Being generous is a very important quality. Can you think of ways you can be generous,? We can give away any clothes we can spare, you can lend your study notes to someone if they need them; maybe you can photocopy them and take the money for it if you don't have it.

You can also be generous with your time; you can devote time to your grandparents and older people. Just go and sit with them for a while; or even your siblings. That requires a lot of generosity; I'd be very impressed with someone who did that. You can be generous with your compliments. How many times have you been to a party when you know you

are looking really good and people are admiring you, but when someone says it to you, don't you feel good? Why can't you be generous with compliments? Even if it's not your friend and it's somebody you just know slightly, you can admire the dress that she is wearing or compliment her on the colour she's wearing. You can be generous like that can't you? That doesn't require very much effort.

Once Asma (ra)'s mother *Khutaiyla* came from Makkah to Madina; she was not a Muslim. She brought gifts of raisins and seeds and other food stuff for her daughter. Asma (ra) who was very happy to see her mother, refused to admit her into her house and accept the gifts. She sent someone quickly to Aisha (ra) and she told her to ask the Prophet (pbuh) if she should let her mother live with her and accept her gifts, because she was not a Muslim. The Prophet (pbuh) said that she certainly should, in fact she should immediately admit her. Nobody could have blamed her even if she did let her mother in as she was meeting her mother after a long time, but even at this she wanted to make sure she was doing what Allah (swt) wanted her to do.

After this incident in Surah Al-Mumtahinah, an *ayah* was revealed to the Prophet (pbuh) which said that Allah (swt) does not forbid you to have contact with those non-Muslims who don't fight you because of your faith, nor drive you from your homes. You may deal kindly and justly with them and Allah (swt) loves those who are kind and just.

There's more to it but you can see that this also shows you the position of a mother; because she was her mother, Allah (swt) said to treat her with kindness. If they are not stopping you from being Muslims then you should be good to them and you should accept their gifts.

Throughout her life Asma (ra) lived well and finally when she was an old woman, almost a hundred years old, the Muslim world was in great turmoil. Four *khalifas* (Caliphs) had passed away and many Muslims felt that her son Abdullah should be the *khalifa* because he was the man most fit for the job.

The Umayyad however, who were rival Muslims based in Syria, wanted Abdul-Maalik-ibn-e-Marwan, who was their man, to be the *Khalifa* so that they could have power and Syria would become strong and important.

They had a powerful army, so there was a civil war because they declared war on him. Abdullah's party kept being beaten back and finally there were just a small band of soldiers left and they had to take refuge in the *Ka'bah*. At this point Abdullah went to his old mother. She was a hundred years old and had become blind as well. He greeted her and she said *wa 'alaikum assalaam* and asked what brought him there at that hour when boulders from Habbab's catapults were raining down on his soldiers in the *Ka'bah* and shaking the houses of Makkah. She told him that he should have been with his men at that time. He said that he had returned to seek her advice. She was astonished. He

explained that people had deserted him out of fear of Hajjaj, who was the Umayyad general and a very cruel man; others were being tempted by the bribes that he had offered them. Even his own children and family had left him. There was only a small group of men with him then and however strong and steadfast they were, they could only resist for an hour or two more. Messengers of Banu-Umayya were even then negotiating with him, offering him whatever worldly possessions he wanted if only he agreed to lay down his arms and swear allegiance to Abdul Maalik. He asked his mother what he should do.

She could have said that he had done his best and that there were just a handful of people left; he had fought, he had tried. Instead, she encouraged him to make his own decision; she asked him to persevere and fight on if he was convinced that his cause was true because his companions who were killed under his flag had shown perseverance. See how intelligently she reminded him of all the people who had lost their lives fighting for his cause. She advised him not to let it all go to waste. She said that if you desire the world, you are a miserable soul; you will destroy yourself and you will destroy your world.

He informed her that he expected that he would be killed that day. Despite that, she told him that this end would be better for him than surrendering himself to Hajjaj voluntarily. Abdullah responded that he was not afraid of death, only afraid that they would mutilate his body. At this point she could have said yes maybe you should give in and live to fight another day, after all she was his mother. But she told him that there was nothing that a man should fear after death; skinning does not cause any pain to slaughtered sheep. Once you're dead, your body won't feel anything that they do to it, so don't give up what you have fought for, just because of this fear.

Abdullah's face brightened and he praised his mother's noble qualities. He said, "I've come to see you at this hour to hear what I've heard. Allah (swt) knows that I haven't weakened or given up. He's witness over me that I haven't stood up for what I have, out of love for this world and its attractions; but only out of anger, for the sake of Allah (swt)." Allah's (swt) limits had been breached and this was the reason that he fought; because the Umayyad were fighting for the wrong cause. They just wanted power; it was not for Allah (swt), it was not for Islam. He said, "Here am I going to do what is pleasing to Allah (swt) so if I'm killed don't feel bad for me but commend me to Allah (swt)."

"I will feel bad for you," said the aging Asma, "only if you are killed in a useless and unjust cause."

Abdullah replied, "Be assured that your son has not supported an unjust cause nor committed any bad deed; nor done any injustice to a Muslim or a non-Muslim. There is nothing better than the pleasure of Allah (swt)."

She answered him, “*Alhamdulillah*, Allah (swt) has made you according to what He likes and according to what I feel. Come close to me my son so I can smell and feel your body for this might be my last meeting with you. She knew that he was going to his death; he was going to die and she was his mother. She hugged and kissed him and put her hand on his body because she was blind but suddenly she withdrew her hands and asked what he was wearing. He said that was his armor. She told him that armor is not suitable for one who desires martyrdom, and then she asked him to take it off.

She realized that they were a very small band who would be fighting this great army of soldiers and didn't have a great chance of their survival but still they needed to be quick and light on their feet. If he was wearing armor, he wouldn't be able to move quickly because of its weight. She also asked him to wear a long robe so that if he was killed, his body would not be exposed; the *satar* would be covered. Even at death, she was concerned about his dignity. So he took off his armor, put on his robe and left, asking his mother to pray for him.

It's a beautiful prayer that she did for him and at the end of the day Abdullah was killed. He killed many of his enemies and was able to accomplish a lot but there were just too few of them to stand up to all those people and they died. He was the victim of small minded men who thought only of the riches of this world.

After his death they hung him up and Hajjaj came to Asma (ra) and asked, “Now what do you think of me and what I've done to your son?” She stood up to him and told him that he may have ruined his world but Abdullah had ruined Hajjaj's Hereafter. What he had done was wrong; she kept standing there until he was forced to take Abdullah off the cross and with her own hands she bathed him in zamzam water and took care of his final rites, *kafan* (funeral) *dafan* (burial) and everything. It must have been very difficult because she was such an old woman and to see her son in that condition and to know that he had died in this cause fighting for Allah (swt). But she did it and then ten days later she also passed away. May Allah (swt) have mercy on her soul and grant her the finest rewards for her *imaan* and strength of character.

So you see that these were the women of Islam, the earlier *sahabiyat* and even the later ones, were in the thick of everything. Despite their *pardah* they were very involved in the affairs of the state. They were very involved in the affairs of the country and they were a part of whatever was going on with the Muslim *ummah*; they were not shut off from everybody.

Another thing Asma (ra) was very good at, was the interpretation of dreams. She could interpret dreams and many leading scholars learned the principles from her, because that's a very difficult art and very few can interpret dreams properly, but she had this gift.

In fact one of the most famous books of that time about the interpretation of dreams, is by a student of hers, Ibn-e-Sireen.

She was one of the first and one of the most brilliant female students of the Prophet (pbuh); women also used to go and learn from the Prophet (pbuh) behind their veil. She is the narrator of fifty eight *ahadith* and her husband, who is one of the ten blessed companions of the Prophet (pbuh) only narrated thirty-eight.

Whatever Asma (ra) set on to do, she accomplished. Whatever she set her mind to, she was able to do. She did it and followed that path until she accomplished what she wanted to. It was always in the best interest of Islam and for the betterment of the Muslim *ummah*.

As the saying goes, the world steps aside for the woman who knows her own direction; Asma-binte-Abi-Bakr (ra) was a lady who really knew where she wanted to go.

I think all of us as Muslim women should know what our direction is; what our choices are and where our choices will lead us.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *SubhanaRabbikaRabbullzzati 'ammayasifunwasalamun 'alalmursaleen, walhamdulillahiRabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *AssalamalaikumwarahmatullahiwaBarakatuh*