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## Discourse Seven: Why Did the Prophet Marry So Much?

A criticism made by some regarding the respectable Prophet of Islam (S) is the issue of his many wives. Critics say that having many wives is essentially a sign of evil and unconditional surrender before lust. They question why the Prophet of Islam did not content himself with the four wives that he had legitimized for his followers and took up to nine wives at the same time.

This discussion has various aspects related to many verses scattered throughout the Qur'an. I will enter into an extensive discussion regarding all these aspects in the exegesis of the related verses elsewhere. Here I will suffice with a concise presentation of the matter.

First of all, critics must essentially realize that the polygyny of the Prophet was not due to excessive attraction to women. The Prophet's marriages were related to other aspects which I will now succinctly discuss.

The first wife of the Holy Prophet was Khad jah 1. He lived with her alone for over twenty years—two thirds of his life after this marriage—without taking another wife. The Prophet was appointed to prophethood in the period after this marriage. After his appointment, he lived in Mecca for thirteen years. After that, he immigrated to Medina and started his widespread religious promotion.

After Khad jah's death, the Prophet married some women, both maidens and widows, young and old. This liberty in marriage lasted for around ten years and, after this, additional marriages were prohibited for the Prophet.2

Therefore, it is evident that the many marriages of the Prophet cannot be due to overt philogyny. The facts that early in his life the Prophet sufficed with only Khad®jah and at the end of his life marriage was prohibited for him are inconsistent with the calumny of lasciviousness.

Furthermore, we see that men who have great passion for women, love their beauty and adornments

and relish their coquetry and demureness. Such men are mostly fond of young and attractive women who are in the spring of their life. However, none of these characteristics is evident in the spiritual bearing of the Prophet of Islam.

In his marriages he was not bound by any of these matters. Thus, history shows that after marrying a maiden, he also married a widow. 3 Also, after marrying a young and beautiful woman, he also married a feeble aged woman. 4 The history of the Prophet is the best witness to this fact.

History attests that the Prophet's marriage to Umm al-Salamah, who was an elderly woman, and Zaynab daughter of Jahsh, who was fifty, occurred after his marriage to 'E'shah and Umm Habsbah, who were young and beautiful.

In addition, the Prophet himself enjoined his wives against adornments and luxuriousness. He gave them a choice between divorce and a life of austerity and abandonment of adornments and luxury. The best witness to this fact is the Qur'an:

"O prophet! Say unto your wives, 'If you desire this world's life and its adornment, then come, I will give you a gift and allow you a goodly release. But if you desire Allah and his Messenger and the Last Abode, then surely Allah has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward'."5

In principle, dislike of adornments and luxury cannot be a mental quality of a person who is madly addicted to relations with women.

## Reasons for the Prophet's marriages

A fair researcher has no choice but to justify the many marriages of the Prophet during his middle years on a basis other than lust and hedonism.

Some of his marriages were exclusively to gain influence. He hoped to extend his tribe and kin through marriage in the interests of proselytization.

Certain marriages were for the purpose of appeasing and assuaging various individuals. Though marriage he safeguarded himself against possible dangers to his mission.

In some marriages, his aim was merely to deliver a woman from misfortune and provide her livelihood. In this way he edified his followers in practice and taught them to support the poor and helpless.

In a number of his marriages, the aim was to carry out a divine decree and in this way eradicate some of the unsound thoughts of the Age of Ignorance. This was his intent in marrying Zaynab, the daughter of Jahsh. At first, she was the wife of Zayd ibn Hirithah, who was the adopted son of the Prophet of Allah.

Arabs believed that one could not marry the wife of an adopted son just as he could not marry the wife of his own son by birth. After Zayd divorced Zaynab, the Prophet married her in order to oppose this false thought. There are various Qur'anic verses in this regard such as:

"So when Zayd took his need of her and divorced her, We wed her to you so that there will be no fault for believers regarding marriage to the wives of their adopted sons after divorce and the command of Allah must be fulfilled."6

## The wives of the Prophet

Approximately one year after the passing of Khad®jah, the Prophet married Sawdah daughter of Zamaʻah. 7 Sawdah's husband died when returning from the second migration to Abyssinia. 8 Sawdah was a faithful woman who had gone to Abyssinia with her husband. She held the glorious title of émigré [muh®jarah].

When she lost her husband, if she had returned to her family, who were unbelievers, she would surely have been persecuted and maybe even killed. Moreover, they would have tried to force her to revert to her previous unbelief. Therefore, the Prophet married her so that she would be safe from torment and persecution.

Zaynab, daughter of Khuzaymah, was wedded to the Prophet after her husband, 'Abd All®h ibn Jahsh, was killed in the battle of Uhud. Zaynab was a great and virtuous woman from the Age of Ignorance. She was called "Umm al-Mas®k®n"—literally Mother of the Destitute—since she showed great kindness and compassion to the poor and needy. The Prophet married her to preserve her status and prestige.9

Another wife of the Prophet was called Umm al-Salamah and her original name was Hind. Before she became the Prophet's wife, she was married to 'Abd All®h Ab® Salamah, cousin and foster brother to the Prophet.

'Abd All®h was the first person to immigrate to Abyssinia. Umm al-Salamah was a virtuous and devout woman and also a religious authority. When her husband died, she was advanced in age and the guardian of her orphans. Under such conditions, the Prophet of Islam took her hand in marriage. 10

The Prophet married Safiyyah, daughter of Hayy ibn Akhtab, chief of Ban Nad R, after her husband

was killed in the battle of Khaybar. Her father was also killed in the same battle. Safiyyah was among the prisoners of Khaybar and the Prophet chose her for himself and freed her. Then, he married her and thus saved her from abjectness. Also, through this marriage he became in-laws with Ban® Isr®®1.11

After the incident of Ban® al-Mustalaq, the Prophet married Juwayriyah who was previously named Barrah. She was the daughter of H®rith, the chief of the Ban® al-Mustalaq tribe. In the incident of Ban® al-Mustalaq, Muslims captured the women and children of two hundred families.

From among them, the Prophet married Juwayriyah. Subsequently, the Muslims freed all the prisoners because they had become the Prophet's kin. Freedom of the prisoners positively influenced the people of the tribe and the whole of the tribe's considerable population turned to the Prophet and converted to Islam. In addition, this deed had a significantly favorable effect on all Arab people.

Another wife of the Prophet of Islam was Maymenah. Her previous name was Barrah and she was the daughter of Herith Haleliyah. After the death of her second husband, Abe Rahm ibn 'Abd al-'Uzze, she gifted herself unto the Prophet. The Prophet set her free and married her. A Qur'anic verse was revealed with regard to this issue.

Umm Hab bah was also among the wives of the Prophet. Her name was Ramlah and she was the daughter of Ab Sufiy n. She was formerly the wife of 'Abd All hibn Jahsh. She and her husband were part of the second hijrah to Abyssinia, where her husband became Nazarene. She, however, kept faith with Islam. During this time, her father was a bitter enemy of the Prophet and continually incited the people against Islam. The Prophet married Umm Hab bah and thus put her under his protection.

Hafsah, daughter of 'Umar, was also one of the wives of the Prophet. After her husband, Khanss ibn Hudhsfah was killed in the battle of Badr, the Prophet married her. The Prophet had also previously married the maiden 's'ishah, daughter of Abs Bakr.

Considering these facts and what we have discussed regarding the customs of the Prophet throughout his life, the fact that he was an austere person and eschewed luxury and that he also enjoined his wives to austerity and against luxury, leaves no doubt that basically, the marriages of the Prophet were not like those of others who marry to appease their lusts.

One must also note that essentially the Prophet's behavior with women was courteous and respectful.

On the whole women's rights, which in the dark Age of Ignorance had been destroyed under the caprice of men, were revived by the Prophet.

Thus women, who had lost their legitimate status in the human society after many dark aeons of Ignorance, achieved their true position. It is even narrated that the final testament of the Prophet on the threshold of death was a recommendation regarding women.

Regarding the importance of ritual prayer [salst], the necessity of giving due consideration to servants,

and advice about women he stated:

"Ritual prayer, ritual prayer (is very important). Also, do not burden servants more than they can bear. For the love of Allah, (I advise you to be considerate) of women for they are allies that are always with you."12

The Prophet's justice, cordiality, and consideration for women were specific to him. We must also not leave it unsaid that, like continuous [wis lasting, the permissibility for marrying more than four wives was restricted to the Prophet and it was forbidden for his followers to perform these deeds.

It was these characteristics of the Prophet that prevented people—even his enemies who were vehemently seeking his weak points—from any kind of protest. 13

- 1. The prophet married Khad jah fifteen years before his appointment as a prophet. He was 25 years old when he married Khad jah, who was forty. She was a widow who previously had two husbands. Her first husband was named 'At jah ibn Mundhir Makhz and she had a child by him named Jeriyah. Her second husband was called Ab Helah ibn Mundhir Asad and she also had a child by him named Hind.
- 2. This prohibition was required by the following verse:
- ﴾ لاَ يَحِلُّ لَكَ النِّسَاء مِنْ بَعْدُ وَلاَ أَن تَبَدَّلَ بِهِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ حُسْنُهُنَّ إِلاَّ مَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رَقِيبًا ﴿
- "It is not allowed for you to marry women after this, nor that you should change them for other wives, though their beauty be pleasing to you, except what your right hand possesses (your handmaidens) and Allah is watchful over all things." (Sirat al-Ahzib 33:52)
- 3. The only maiden wife the Prophet took was 'E'ishah. After the death of Khad Ejah, the Prophet wedded her in Mecca and consecrated the marriage in Medina after the Hijra. The other wives the Prophet took after Khad Ejah, which were all widows, are as follows: 1. Sawdah; 2. Zaynab bint Khuzaymah; 3. Hafsah; 4. Umm al–Salamah; 5. Zaynab bint Jahsh; 6. Juwayriyah; 7. Umm Hab Ebah; 8. Safiyyah; 9. Maym Enah.
- 4. The first wife of the Prophet was Khad jah who—as cited by Ahmad ibn Hasan Hurr 'Emile—was forty when she married the Prophet. 'E'ishah was six when the Prophet married her after the death of Khad jah; however, as we stated, the marriage was consecrated after the Hijra when she was ten. (I must note that marriage at a young age was customary at the time and this was not considered a young age for marriage [trans.]) None of the women the Prophet married after 'E'ishah were maidens and most of them were advanced in years.
- 5. Srat al-Ahzab 33:28-29.
- 6. S rat al-Ahz b 33:37.
- 7. The Prophet took three wives in Mecca: Khad®jah, '®'ishah, and Sawdah. He married the others in Medina after the Hijra.
- 8. According to another narration, he died in Abyssinia. Also, Sawdah died in Medina near the close of 'Umar's rule.
- 9. The Prophet's marriage to Zaynab occurred in the third year of the Hijra and after the battle of 'Uhud. After her marriage, she only lived in the house of the Prophet for a few months before she passed away and was buried in the Baq® Cemetery.
- 10. Umm al-Salamah was the daughter of Ab® Umayyah Hudhayfah ibn Mughayrah. After Khad®jah al-Kubr®, she was the most virtuous of the Prophet's wives. The Prophet married her in the 4th year of the Hijra. She died in 61 AH. It should be noted that except for Khad®jah and Zaynab bint Khuzaymah, all the wives of the Prophet passed away after him.
- 11. Safiyyah married the Prophet in the 7th year of the Hijra after the battle of Khaybar. She was previously married twice,

first with Sal®m ibn Muslim and then with Kan®nah ibn Rab®.

- 12. Al-Mtztn, vol. 4, p. 197; also Mtztn al-Hikmah, vol. 4, p. 3241.
- 13. From the yearbook, "Maktab-e Tashayyu'".

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