118102 - The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not marry merely to enjoy that which Allah had made permissible for him

the question

Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) marry for two reasons: (i) in the interests of da‘wah (calling people to Islam) and (ii) going along with the natural inclination to enjoy what Allah had made permissible for him?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is well-known that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was human. Allah, may He be exalted, honoured him with Prophethood and sent him to all of mankind, and the fact that he possessed all the attributes dictated by human nature, such as the need to eat, drink, sleep, urinate, defecate, protect himself from cold and heat and from enemies, and that he also enjoyed intimate relations, good food and drink, and other things dictated by human nature, does not detract from his Prophethood or undermine his message. Rather Allah said to him (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): ‘I don’t tell you that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor (that) I know the unseen” [al-An‘aam 6:50]. And he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said concerning himself: “I am only human, like you; I forget as you forget.”

Not having knowledge of the unseen and forgetting things that one knows may be shortcomings in knowledge per se, but because that is part of the nature of the human being, whom Allah has created weak in all his affairs, this cannot be regarded as detracting from or undermining the status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Undoubtedly the desire for intimate relations is part of human nature, and for a person to have a perfect desire for that is a sign of his perfect makeup; the strength thereof is indicative of sound

health and wellbeing. Hence it is proven in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, in the hadith of Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him), that he said: We used to say that he – i.e., the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) – had been given the strength of thirty men.

That is, in terms of intimate relationships with women. That – and Allah knows best – so that he might be able to marry the women whom Allah permitted to him, regardless of their number, and fulfil their rights, and so that by means of the large number of his wives he might be able to attain great things both in their interests and the interests of the entire ummah. Were it not for the strength that Allah gave him, he would not have been able to marry this number or fulfil their rights of being intimate with them and maintaining their chastity.

If we assume that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had married a woman merely to fulfil his physical desires and to go along with his natural inclinations, that not have detracted from his Prophethood and would not have been a shortcoming on his part (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). How could it have been, when he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Women may be married for four things: their wealth, their lineage, their beauty and their religious commitment. Choose the one who is religiously-committed, may your hands be rubbed with dust (i.e., may you prosper)”? In fact, Allah said to him (interpretation of the meaning): “It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you” [al-Ahzaab 33:52]. But up till now we do not know that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) ever married a woman merely to satisfy his desires; if that had been the case, he would have chosen young virgins of dazzling beauty, as he said to Jaabir (may Allah be pleased with him), when he told him that he had married a previously-married woman: “Why not a virgin, so you could play with her and she could play with you?” And according to other reports he said: “So you could joke with her and she could joke with you” or “What about virgins and playing with them?” Narrated by al-Bukhaari. Rather the marriages of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) were for the purposes of either softening hearts (of the woman’s tribe), by way of honouring (the woman and her family), by way of consoling and helping the woman, by way of rewarding (the woman or her family), or other important purposes which were summed up in Fath al-Baari (9/115) where the

author said:

What may be summed up from the words of the scholars concerning the wisdom behind the Prophet’s taking many wives is ten points:

1.So that there would be many people who could see how he was in his private life, so as to dispel what the mushrikeen thought about him being a practitioner of witchcraft and the like.

2.So as to honour thereby the Arab tribes by making them his in-laws.

3.So as to soften their hearts more.

4.To increase his duties, as he was instructed that his love for his wives should not distract him from his duty of conveying the message of Allah.

5.To increase his family connections through his wives so that he would have more people to help him against those who fought him.

6.To convey Islamic rulings that men would not be able to find out about, because most of that which happens with one’s wife is matters that are usually hidden.

7.To give insight into the beautiful of his hidden characteristics. He married Umm Habeebah at the time when her father was opposed to him, and he married Safiyyah after her father, paternal uncle and husband were killed. Were it not for his perfect characteristics they would have resented him, but what happened was that he became dearer to them than their entire families.

8.We have referred above to the fact that he had extraordinary strength for intimate relations despite the fact that he ate and drank little, and he fasted a great deal and often fasted continuously (for several days and nights in a row), and he instructed those who could not afford to get married to fast, and indicated that fasting a great deal would dampen desire. So his case it was extraordinary that fasting did not have any impact on his desire (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

9.And 10. We have mentioned above, quoting from the author of ash-Shifa’, that he maintained

their chastity and fulfilled their rights. End quote.

I (Ibn ‘Uthaymeen) said: The eighth point was because Allah gave him the strength of thirty men, as stated above.

11.There is also an eleventh point, which was to manifest his complete fairness and justice in dealing with his wives, so that his ummah could follow his example.

12.To spread Islamic rulings and regulations further, because they could be spread further through many than through one.

13.To console those who had lost their status, as in the case of Safiyyah bint Huyayy and Juwayriyah bint al-Haarith, the daughter of the chief of Banu’l-Mustaliq.

14.To confirm the shar‘i ruling and correct the corrupt belief which was deeply rooted in people’s hearts, as they thought it was prohibited to marry the ex-wife of an adopted son, as in the story of Zaynab, because convincing people by means of actions is more effective than convincing them by means of words. We also see how the people were convinced when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) shaved his head at al-Hudaybiyah and they hastened to do that when he shaved his head, after they had been slow to shave their heads despite the fact that he had instructed them to do that.

15.Softening hearts and strengthening ties, as in the case of ‘Aa’ishah and Hafsah. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) strengthened his ties with his four successors through marriage, even though he had especially close ties with some of them. So he married the daughters of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, and he gave his three daughters in marriage to ‘Uthmaan and ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all). Glory be to the One Who granted His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) this wisdom and enabled him to live accordingly, by means of what He granted him of physical strength and by means of what He permitted for him. So He gave him the strength of thirty men, and permitted to him whatever he wanted of women, for He, may He be glorified, is Most Wise, All-Knowing.

With regard to the fact that he did not marry the one who offered herself to him in marriage, this does not indicate that he married others on the basis of mere desire and fulfilling physical urges.

With regard to the daughter of al-Jawn, he did not refuse to marry her; rather he entered upon her and was alone with her, but she sought refuge with Allah from him, so the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) left her and said: “You have sought refuge with One Who is Almighty; so go back to your family.” But did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) marry her only for her beauty and to fulfil his desire, or was it for some other reason? If it was for some other reason, then there is no grounds for quoting this story as evidence to prove that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) got married only for the purpose of fulfilling his desire. If it was for the purpose of fulfilling his desire, then by the wisdom of Allah, may He be exalted, he was prevented from doing so with this woman, because she sought refuge with Allah from him.

With regard to Sawdah (may Allah be pleased with her), she was afraid that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would divorce her because she had grown old, so she gave her day to ‘Aa’ishah, but the fact that she was afraid of that does not necessarily mean that he had thought of doing that. With regard to the report which says that he did actually divorce her, it is da‘eef (weak) because it is mursal.

With regard to the marriage of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to Zaynab, it was not because of her beauty; rather it was in order to dispel a belief that was prevalent among the Arabs, which was that it was not allowed for a man to marry the ex-wife of one whom he had adopted as a son. So Allah abolished adoption and abolished the rulings that were connected to it among the Arabs. Because that belief was so prevalent and deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the Arabs, the effect of words in uprooting it was too slow, and the effect of actions would be faster. So in His great wisdom, Allah, may He be glorified, decree that this should happen with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in his marriage to the ex-wife of his freed slave Zayd ibn Haarithah, whom he had previously adopted, so as to put the Muslims’ minds at rest with regard to this divine ruling, and so that there would be no reservations in their hearts concerning that. Allah, may He be exalted, referred to this wisdom in the verse in which He said

(interpretation of the meaning):

“So when Zayd had accomplished his desire from her (i.e. divorced her), We gave her to you in marriage, so that (in future) there may be no difficulty to the believers in respect of (the marriage of) the wives of their adopted sons when the latter have no desire to keep them (i.e. they have divorced them). And Allah’s Command must be fulfilled”

[al-Ahzaab 33:37].

Think about what Allah says here: “We gave her to you in marriage” – this conveys the idea that her marriage to him was not the result of his asking for that or hoping for it; rather it was a decree from Allah to confirm the shar‘i ruling so that it would be instilled in people’s hearts and minds and there would be no reservations concerning it. Thus it is known that the report is false which suggests that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to Zayd one day for some reason and saw Zaynab, and was smitten by her beauty and said: “Glory be to Allah, the Controller of the hearts”; Zaynab told Zayd about that and he realised what was being hinted at, so he took a dislike to her and divorced her after consulting the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who said to him, “Keep your wife and fear Allah.” This report is false and is contrary to what Allah mentioned of the wisdom behind His giving her to him in marriage. It was rejected by Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) who did not quote it, and he said: We wanted to ignore the reports which were narrated from some of the early generation because they are not sound, so we did not narrate them. The fact that this report is false is indicated by the fact that it is not befitting to the status of the Prophets, let alone the best of them and the one who most feared Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. This story is more akin to the fabricated story about Dawood (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and the tricks he allegedly used in order to marry the wife of one who had only one wife, according to what is mentioned in some of the books of tafseer in the commentary on the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And has the news of the litigants reached you?...” [Saad 38:21]. The one who understands the status of the Prophets and how far removed they were from injustice, transgression, plotting and treachery will realise that this story is a lie against the

Prophet of Allah Dawood (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

To sum up:

Even though it was permissible for the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to marry merely in order to fulfil his desire and because of attraction to beautiful women, and that would not have detracted from his status, we know of no case in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married a woman for such a purpose and she settled and remained with him. And Allah knows best. End quote.