121823 - Detailed discussion about the hadith “Tell him to bite his father’s male member” and refutation of those who say that this is gratuitously obscene speech

the question

An atheist asked me: How could the Messenger (peace be upon him) speak obscene words, when he is a Prophet, such as “Tell him to bite his father’s male member”, and approve of Abu Bakr saying, “Suck the clitoris of al-Laat”, even though the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade obscene speech? Can you give a detailed response, may Allah bless you?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The Muslim should not pay any attention to the slander against our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). His Lord, may He be exalted, praised him for his sublime character and said (interpretation of the meaning): “And verily, you (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) are on an exalted standard of character” [al-Qalam 68:4]. If this is how the Lord of heaven and earth praised him (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), then any slander or criticism of him is of no value. We do not follow a Prophet of whose devotion to Allah and character we know nothing; rather we know the most precise details of his life. His status was high even before his mission began, and even the ignorant testified to his perfect manners and attitude, and they could not find any reason to criticise him. What is strange is that an atheist comes along and says the worst things about the Lord of the worlds and denies his existence, and he criticises the character of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and accuses him of obscene and false speech, yet he turns a blind eye to his perfect character and forgets his sublime biography and his teachings. Such a one is most deserving of

the words of the poet:

Assume that I said that this morning is night; could all people be blind to the light?

Secondly:

Our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was more shy than a virgin in her seclusion, even after he was sent with the greatest message for mankind, in which there are rulings covering the tiniest details of people's lives. But with regard to those issues that have to do with the 'awrah (private parts), we find that he was very restrained in his speech, and he used the most eloquent phrases and avoided crude words; he would convey the desired message by choosing appropriate words from the rich Arabic language. This applied to many issues, such as relieving oneself, bathing (full ablution), marital issues, and so on. He used various words so that a man could use these phrases without causing embarrassment in front of women. Perhaps one example is sufficient to confirm what is mentioned above, otherwise there are many such examples. It was narrated from 'Aa'ishah that a woman asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about ghusl (full ablution) following menses, and he told her how to do ghusl. "Take a piece of cloth scented with musk and purify yourself with it." She said: How should I purify myself? He said: "Purify yourself with it." She said: How? He said: "Subhaan-Allah! Purify yourself." I pulled her towards me and said: Follow the traces of blood with it.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (308) and Muslim (332).

What is meant by a piece of cloth perfumed with musk is a piece of wool or cotton on which is that well-known kind of perfume.

According to a report narrated by al-Bukhaari (309):

It was narrated from 'Aa'ishah that a woman of the Ansaar said to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): How should I do ghusl following menses? He said: "Take a piece of cloth scented with musk and purify yourself with it three times." Then the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) felt shy, so he turned his face away, or he said: "Purify yourself with

it.” I took her aside and told her what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) meant.

Thirdly:

With regard to the response to the hadith mentioned in the question, we should point out two things before answering in detail:

1.

This wording mentioned in the hadith was not used by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) during his lifetime, and he did not initiate the discussion of this topic; rather he was stating the punishment for the one who boasted in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage. In other words it was prescribed as a response to the one who committed a forbidden action, namely the tribalism of the Jaahiliyyah (pre-Islamic period of ignorance).

2.

Whatever penalties and punishments are prescribed in the laws of Allah, may He be exalted, the purpose thereof is to prevent sins that could spoil people’s lives. Whoever thinks that cutting off the hand (of the thief) is an extreme punishment should understand that by means of it his wealth is protected from thieves. Whoever regards as harsh the stoning of the previously-married adulterer should understand that by means of it he will be safe from immoral people transgressing against his honour. And the same applies to all the other punishments and penalties. The same may be said about the prescribed punishment for ignorant tribalism and boasting of one’s tribe and forefathers. It is prescribed for the phrase in question to be said to one who raises the banner of ignorant tribalism, in order to put an end to it, and to stop people saying such things. We should look at how effective these punishments and deterrents are in purifying people’s words, deeds and attitudes. This is what matters for one who is wise and strives to rid society of evil and evildoers.

Fourthly:

With regard to the detailed response concerning the hadith mentioned in the question, we will

quote a few versions of the hadith, then follow that with the comments of the scholars on the matter.

It was narrated from Ubayy ibn Ka‘b that a man boasted in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, so he told him to bite his father’s male member, and he did not use a metaphor. The people looked askance at him, so he said to the people: I can see what you are thinking, and I can only say this: that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed us: “If you hear someone boasting in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, then tell him to bite his father’s male member, and do not use a metaphor.”

Narrated by Ahmad (35/157); classed as hasan by the commentators on al-Musnad.

It was narrated from Ubayy (may Allah be pleased with him) that a man boasted of his tribal lineage, and Ubayy told him to bite his father’s male member, and they said: You were never given to obscene speech! He said: We were instructed to do that.

Narrated by Ahmad (35/142); classed as hasan by the commentators on al-Musnad and as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami‘.

Abu Ja‘far at-Tahhaawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

in this hadith, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave those instructions concerning the one who is heard boasting in that ignorant manner. Someone said: How could you accept this report from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) when you narrate from him the words, “Shyness is part of faith and faith leads to Paradise, and foul speech is part of harshness, and harshness is of the Fire”?

He said:

In this hadith it states that foul speech is in the Fire, and what is meant by foul speech being in the Fire is that the people of foul speech will be in the Fire, because foul speech is not an entity that exists by itself; rather what is meant by mentioning it is those who have that characteristic.

Our response concerning that – with the help of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted – is as follows:

The foul speech referred to in this hadith is something other than the foul speech referred to in the first hadith. It is foul speech that is addressed to one who does not deserve to be spoken to in that manner. The one who speaks in a foul manner to one who does not deserve that is subject to the warning in the hadith mentioned. As for that which is mentioned in the first hadith, it is a punishment to the one who promoted ignorant attitudes, because he is promoting pride in a man who is one of the people of Hell. It is like when they used to call their tribes with a sense of pride in being the descendants of Bakr, Tameem, Hamdaan, and so on (ancestors of Arab tribes). Whoever shows pride in these people of Jaahiliyyah, who are among the inhabitants of Hell, deserves to be punished, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) ordained that his punishment should be that he is responded to as mentioned in the second hadith, so as to insult him and the one in whom he seeks pride, so that people would stop doing that in the future and not go back to it.

This hadith was also narrated without this particular wording:

It was narrated that ‘Utayy ibn Damurah said: One day I saw him – i.e., Ubayy ibn Ka‘b – when a man was boasting in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, and he told him to bite that part of his father, and he did not use a metaphor. It was as if the people found that odd, so he said: Do not blame me, for the Prophet of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to us: “Whoever you see boasting in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, then tell him to bite that, and do not use a metaphor.”

The meaning is the same as the hadith quoted above, because what is meant by “one who is boasting in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage” is that he is attributing himself to the people of Jaahiliyyah.

Bayaan Mushkil al-Athaar (8/51-54)

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Hence some of the scholars said that this indicates that it is permissible to bluntly state the name of the private part if there is a need to do so or there is an interest to be served thereby, and this does not come under the heading of obscene speech that is forbidden, as in the hadith of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

"If you hear someone boasting in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, then tell him to bite his father's male member, and do not use a metaphor." Narrated by Ahmad. And Ubayy ibn Ka'b heard a man saying: O So and so, and he said: Bite your father's penis. Something was said to him about that, and he said: This is what the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed us to do (in the case of such a person).

Minhaaj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah (8/408, 409)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the hadith of Abu Dawood: A man sneezed in the presence of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and (the man) said: As-salaamu 'alaykum (peace be upon you). The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "And upon you be peace and upon your mother."

Mentioning the mother here is similar to mentioning the penis of the father in the case of one who boasts in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage. It may be said to him: Bite your father's penis, and mentioning the father's penis here is more effective in admonishing and rebuking the one who boasts in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, because it is reminding him of the part of his father from which he emerged, namely his father's penis, so he should not go beyond the bounds in pride and arrogance. Similarly, in the other example, mentioning the mother is more effective in rebuking him, by suggesting that he is still as illiterate or ignorant as the day on which his mother bore him [this is a play on words in Arabic, as the word ummiyyah (illiteracy) is similar to the word umm (mother)]. And Allah knows best what the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) meant.

Zaad al-Ma'aad fi Hadiy Khayr al-'Ibaad (2/438)

Fifthly:

The senior Sahaabah acted on this advice and regarded it as a punishment to be carried out on whoever deserved it, and they did not regard it as rude in any way. We have mentioned above the words of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, who narrated the hadith on this topic. This was also said by Abu Bakr as-Siddeeq (may Allah be pleased with him), when ‘Urwah ibn Mas‘ood, who came as a negotiator on behalf of the mushrikeen at al-Hudaybiyah, said to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): By Allah I see faces, and I see a mixture of people who are most likely going to flee and desert you. Abu Bakr said to him: Suck the clitoris of al-Laat! Would we flee and desert him? He said: Who is that? They said: Abu Bakr.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2581)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The clitoris is the piece of flesh that remains in the woman’s vulva after circumcision (removal of the prepuce of the clitoris). Al-Laat is the name of one of the idols that Quraysh and Thaqeef used to worship. It was the custom of the Arabs to revile one another in this manner, but by mentioning the mother, so Abu Bakr wanted to go further in reviling ‘Urwah by referring to his object of worship instead of his mother. What made him do that was his anger towards him when he accused the Muslims of being cowards and saying that they would flee. This also indicates that it is permissible to say words that are regarded as foul or bad for the purpose of rebuking one who behaves in a manner that leads to him deserving that. Ibn al-Munayyir said: In the words of Abu Bakr we see an insult to the enemy, rejection of their beliefs, and highlighting the flaws in their belief when they said that al-Laat was the daughter of Allah – exalted be Allah far above that – by suggesting that if she was a daughter that she would have what every female has.

Fath al-Baari (5/340)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The words of Abu Bakr as-Siddeeq to ‘Urwah – “Suck the clitoris of al-Laat – indicate that it is permissible to name of the private part bluntly, if that will serve the purpose, according to the situation, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave permission to mention

the father’s male member bluntly to the one who boasted in an ignorant manner of his tribal lineage, to whom it may be said: “Bite your father’s penis”, without using a metaphor. Every situation is to be dealt in the manner that is appropriate to it.

Zaad al-Ma aad fi Hadiy Khayr al-‘Ibaad (3/305)

And Allah knows best.