477391 - Reconciling a Hadith With Science

the question

I studied anatomy, and medicine. I know teeth have similarities with bone in terms of color; both are hard and have calcium. But teeth are not bones. They serve two different functions. The material of the teeth is not the same as the bone. Although there are similarities, there are huge differences. when the Prophet said teeth are bone, was he speaking in a medical and scientific way, classifying teeth as bone, or was he noting their similarities, like analogy or metaphorical? if he classified teeth as bone, then it\'s completely incorrect. Based on this, can we say that it wasn\'t said by the Prophet? Perhaps one of the narrators added it, or this hadith can be rejected, as the Prophet of Allah can\'t provide incorrect information. Does that make me commit kufr, if I reject the hadith; I believe the prophet can\'t give wrong info, and if something is wrong then it\'s not Sahih.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

As you have kindly stated, from a precise scientific perspective, the composition of teeth differs from that of bones; therefore, they are not bones anatomically.

Secondly:

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) when he speaks, does so in the manner familiar to the Arabs, and he does not speak in the language of physicians, nor does he intend to convey anatomical information.

The origin of the hadith is that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Whatever

causes blood to flow, and the name of Allah is mentioned over it, eat it; not the tooth or the claw. And I will tell you about that: As for the tooth, it is a bone, and as for the claw, it is the knife of the Abyssinians." Reported by Al-Bukhari (2488), and Muslim (1968).

The intent here is to inform of what is impermissible to use for slaughtering, and the Messenger of Allah prohibited slaughtering with a bone because it is not sharp, which leads to the suffering of the animal being slaughtered, and this is not from the kindness in slaughtering (compassion) that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) commanded out of compassion for the animal.

The intent of the Messenger of Allah is that the tooth is like the bone, lacking an edge sufficient for proper slaughter.

Regarding the meaning of the hadith, another interpretation is mentioned in "Ad-Dibaj" (5/35), which states:

"As for the tooth being a bone": it means do not slaughter with it; because it becomes impure with blood, and I have forbidden you from using bones for cleaning yourselves so as not to make them impure, as they are the sustenance of your brothers from the jinn."

According to this opinion, the prohibition of slaughtering with the tooth is because this would spoil it for the jinn who eat it, so the tooth is from the bone that the jinn eat, and therefore, this has no relation to anatomical precision, but rather it is related to the general category of bones eaten by the jinn, even if it differs from the anatomical bone in some way.

Indeed, if we contemplate the same hadith, we find that the prohibition of slaughtering with the claw is because it is a "knife"; so is the claw a knife in the terminology of "metallurgists" or weapon makers in what a knife is?

The answer is no. The intent is that the Abyssinians used it as a knife because it shares the function of a knife, which is the ability to cut.

Indeed, the jurists do not all agree on equating "the tooth" with "the bone" in the same jurisprudential ruling, let alone the anatomical description. Imam Abu Al-`Abbas Al-Qurtubi (may

Allah have mercy on him) said:

"And (his saying: 'And I will tell you, as for the tooth, it is a bone. And as for the claw, it is the knife of the Abyssinians'): The apparent meaning of this is that it is from the speech of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and it is an indication of the rationale for prohibiting slaughtering with the tooth because it is a bone, and thus, the prohibition from the tooth extends to every bone, whether connected or disconnected. An-Nakha'i, Al-Hasan Ibn Salah, Al-Laith, and Ash-Shafi`i adopted this view. And the jurists among the companions of Hadith prohibited slaughtering with the bone and the claw, however they may be, and permitted it with anything else due to the Hadith. And this is one of the opinions of Malik, as previously mentioned. And it is narrated from Malik that he differentiated between the tooth and the bone; so he permitted it with the bone and disliked it with the tooth, and this is the well-known view of his school." End quote, from Al-Mufhim Lima Ashkala Min Talkhis Kitab Muslim (5/369). Please also see: "At-Tawdih li Sharh Al-Jami` As-Sahih" (26/429).

And also in the chapter of blood money; for the tooth has a set blood money, whereas for the bone, there is no set blood money for its breakage, but the judge rules according to its condition and the impact of the injury on it.

Perhaps this is also why the dictionaries define (Al-Lahi) as: "the bone in which the teeth grow." See: "Ikmal Al-I`lam Bi Ta`lil Al-Kalam" (2/563).

And Allah knows best.