5287 - Does sleeping next to one’s wife cancel out the wudu prescribed before sleeping?

the question

It is part of sunna to make woudu before sleeping for the night.

However, for married couples, the usage is that both the husband and the wife sleep next to each other in the same large bed. I believe that this is not compatible with sunna, and would like to know your opinion. Jazakom allahou khayran.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

On the contrary, it is part of the Sunnah, as is indicated by many ahaadeeth, including that narrated by al-Bukhaari (2945) and Muslim (2727) from ‘Ali, who said that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to him and Faatimah, may Allah be pleased with them both: “When you go to your bed, or when you lie down, say Allahu akbar thirty-three times, Subhaan-Allah thirty-three times and Alhamdulillaah thirty-three times.” According to another report narrated by al-Bukhaari (3502), [‘Ali said:] “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came to us whilst we were lying down, and I went to stand up, but he said, ‘Stay where you are,’ and sat down between us, and I could feel the coolness of his feet on my chest.’”

This hadeeth with its clear wording indicates that it is sunnah for a man to sleep with his wife in one bed. Perhaps the confusion has arisen because when a man does wudu then sleeps in one bed with his wife, he cannot help touching her, and it may be that the questioner is thinking that this will break his wudu, so what is the point of doing wudu? So we have to discuss the question of whether touching a woman breaks wudu or not?

The scholars differed on this matter and there are several points of view, stemming from their

differences in the Tafseer (interpretation) of the Aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“… or [if] you have been in contact with women and you find no water, perform Tayammum with clean earth…” [al-Nisa’ 4:43]

Some scholars said that “contact” here meant only touching with one’s hand, whilst others took it to mean sexual intercourse, as in the aayaat (interpretation of the meaning):

“… then divorce them before you have sexual intercourse with them…” [al-Ahzaab 33:49]

and:

“And if you divorce them before you have touched (had sexual relations with) them…” [al-Baqarah 2:237]

They stated that according to scholarly consensus, the full mahr is not due if a woman has been merely touched before her divorce; the full mahr is due in cases where sexual intercourse has taken place and the marriage has been consummated. This opinion was narrated from ‘Ali, Ubayy ibn Ka’b, Ibn ‘Abbaas, Mujaahid, Taawoos, al-Hasan, ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr, Sa’eed ibn Jubayr, al-Shu’bi, Qutaadah, Muqaatil ibn Hayyaan and Abu Haneefah.”

(Nayl al-Maraam min Tafseer Ayaat al-Ahkaam by Siddeeq Hasan Khaan, 1/316, 314).

The more correct view is that which was narrated from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would do wudu, then kiss her, and then pray, without repeating his wudu.

(See al-Raayah, 1/72; Nayl al-Maraam by Siddeeq Hasan Khaan, 318-322 – footnote).

Al-Bukhaari narrated in al-Saheeh (1/588, no. 513) that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: “I used to sleep in front of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and my legs were in front of him when he prayed. When he did sujood, he would poke me and I would move my legs out of the way, and when he stood up I would stretch them out again… The houses in those days did not have lamps.”

These two texts indicate that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would touch his wife, without repeating his wudu after doing so; he even touched her whilst praying. The Sunnah, which explains the Book of Allah, indicates that merely touching a woman does not cancel wudu. However, if there is any emission of madhiy (prostatic fluid) or maniy (semen), then this breaks wudu.

We hope that this answer will clear up the confusion and free the questioner from any unnecessary restrictions. And Allah is the One Whose help we seek.