

The Prophet's Multiple Marriages: Why?

The issue of the Prophet's multiple marriages is one of the most debated and misunderstood questions regarding the Prophet's life. However, scholars maintain that the Prophet's multiple marriages have their own wisdom and purpose ordained by Allah. In this he is no different than previous prophets such as Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Ya`qub (Jacob), Dawud (David), etc., who all had more than one wife. It is wrong to judge them by the standards of our modern secular values and ideals.

If we approach the marriages of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) based on his mission in light of the milieu he was called upon to fulfill, it is not hard to discover that his marriages were never primarily motivated by sexual considerations. Rather, they had much higher purposes in the divine plan. These goals were mainly related to his mission of unifying Arabs, and also, not less importantly, intended to set standards for reforming intractable customs that had caused so much misery and destruction for humanity.

The Arabs before the rise of Islam were a race who fought relentlessly for even the most trivial matters, and no one before the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had ever succeeded in unifying them. The Prophet unified them; marriage proved to be one of the means of achieving this unity. Again, marriage to a widow was a curse in Arabia as well in other major parts of the world such as India. In most of these societies a widow was considered more like a pariah or curse for the entire family. Almost all of the women that the Prophet married were widows.

A still important factor to consider: The most sexually active phase in anyone's life is before he reaches the age of fifty. We must remember that in this phase, the Prophet had only one wife, Khadijah, who was fifteen years older than him. The Prophet married her when he was twenty-five and she was forty years. She died at the age of sixty-five. It was only after her death and in Madinah, after he had dedicated himself to the task of building a nation, that he married a number of women belonging to different Arab clans, most of them were widows. By marrying them he was setting a precedent to reverse the taboo of widow marriage. Secondly, he was paying back his due to some of the companions who had perished in battles leaving behind widows with children, just as he was also seeking to unify the Arab tribes. Such a function of marriage is inconceivable for us today.

Having said this, it must, however, further be add that: we need not apologize for the Islamic teachings concerning human sexuality. Unlike some religions that hold very negative views of sexuality, Islam celebrates sexuality within the framework of marriage, and looks at it in a fairly positive light, and the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings be upon him) best represents this ideal.

The question of the Prophet's multiple marriage should never pose a problem for the faithful when they heed the statement of Allah in the Qur'an concerning his marriages:

“(Hence) no blame whatever attaches to the Prophet for (having done) what God has ordained for him. (Indeed, such was) God's way with those that have passed away afore-time- and remember that God's will is always destiny absolute!” (Al-Ahzab: 38)