

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Unfamiliarity with the life of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ, his character and teachings and his native culture and the social conditions prevalent during his life can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. A common area of misunderstanding is the subject of the Prophet's ﷺ marriages, especially his marriage to 'Ā'ishah ؓ.

At the time of her marriage, 'Ā'ishah ؓ was six, and at the age of nine she started living with the Prophet ﷺ. Unfamiliarity with this course of events can be resolved to some degree by studying the relevant aspects of the lives of the Prophet ﷺ and 'Ā'ishah ؓ, and by learning a bit about cultural norms of the time.

The Prophet ﷺ

The Prophet ﷺ first married at the age of 25. At that time he married Khadījah bint Khuwaylid ؓ, who had been married twice previously (both husbands had passed away) and who was a mother of three children. Khadījah ؓ was the lone wife of the Prophet ﷺ for 25 years until her demise. At that time the Prophet's ﷺ age was approximately 50 years. From this we can see that in his youth the Prophet ﷺ did not opt for a young wife, but instead chose a middle-aged honourable wife who was twice widowed and had three children. Furthermore, after her demise the Prophet ﷺ married Sawda Bint Zam'ah ؓ who was also a widow and had one son.

After the Prophet ﷺ had openly announced his prophethood and invited the leaders of Makkah to accept Islām, they tried in many ways to stop people being inclined towards him. After failing in their attempts, they tried bribing the Prophet ﷺ. 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah was made a representative of the leaders of Makkah, and he tried to bribe the Prophet ﷺ with many things. One of the offers he made was "...If you wish to marry, we will arrange for you to be married to whichever and however many women you wish." The Prophet ﷺ, being a person of honour, refused their offers. This makes it quite clear that the Prophet ﷺ was not (we seek refuge with Allāh ﷻ from such assertions) a man of lust and desire, and his decisions were not based on his own whims and fancies, but rather for the sake of propagating Islām and its teachings.

'Ā'ishah ؓ

With regards to 'Ā'ishah ؓ, a few things should be noted. Firstly, at the age of six she was physically in a position to be married, this is why before marrying the Prophet ﷺ, she was already engaged to the son of Jubayr ibn Mut'im. However, because of Abū Bakr ؓ and his family accepting Islām, Jubayr and his wife disliked 'Ā'ishah ؓ coming into their house and therefore cancelled the arrangement. Secondly, 'Ā'ishah ؓ herself explains that after her marriage (before she actually went to live with the Prophet ﷺ) her mother would take great care of her health. Thereafter, when she reached the age of nine and had become well built, her mother called her one day

and got her ready and sent her to the Prophet ﷺ, accompanied by some girls of the Ansār.

From this incident we learn that the Prophet ﷺ did not himself request or demand that 'Ā'ishah ؓ be sent to stay with him. On the contrary, it was her mother who herself thought it appropriate that she begin to stay with the Prophet ﷺ.

Arab Customs

When the Prophet ﷺ married 'Ā'ishah ؓ an objection arose amongst the people of Makkah. This shows that it was common in the Arab culture of the time to raise objections where necessary. However, the question posed was not that 'Ā'ishah ؓ was too young, nor was it that there was too large an age gap between husband and wife; the question posed was how Muhammad ﷺ could marry the daughter of his brother. Abū Bakr ؓ was a very close friend of the Prophet ﷺ and the Arabs considered that to be equivalent to being a brother, and thus they would regard his daughter as being the Prophet's ﷺ niece. Their silence regarding the age of either of the partners shows that it was acceptable in that society.

Similarly, there are many other examples found among the Arabs of the time that show that they were accustomed to girls marrying young, and that girls attained puberty and psychological maturity at an early age, and were thus well suited to married life. Imām Daraqtunī rahmatullāhi-alayhi narrates that there was a woman who became a grandmother at the age of eighteen: she gave birth to her daughter at the age of nine, and likewise her daughter became a mother at the

same age. ‘Alī ﷺ and the wife of Abdullāh Ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ got their daughters married at an early age. This was not only the custom among young girls, but also among boys. ‘Abdullāh, the son of ‘Amr ibn-ul-‘Ās ﷺ was born when ‘Amr ﷺ was only 12 years of age.

It is also of interest to note the habits and customs that existed in Europe during and after the time of the Prophet ﷺ regarding the age at which marriage was considered appropriate. Without intending to draw any parallels between the motives and driving factors behind the marriage practices of Arabia or Europe, it is simply worth noting that marrying at a young age was not something confined to one country or even one continent. For many noble-born or royal women of Europe, marriage could and often did take place at a young age. There are many instances of very young girls being betrothed and married: Baldwin III, king of Jerusalem (1143-1162), at the age of 28 married Theodora, who was only 13. The marriage of Agnes of France to Alexius, son of Manuel, Emperor of Constantinople took place when she was eight years old and he was thirteen.

Why ‘Ā‘ishah ﷺ

A question may still arise as to the rationale and wisdom behind the Prophet ﷺ marrying ‘Ā‘ishah ﷺ in those particular circumstances. One obvious answer is related to the propagation and preservation of the Prophet’s ﷺ teachings.

If we look to the Islamic sources we find that even though a great amount of information re-

garding the Prophet’s ﷺ early years as a prophet is recorded, in comparison to the latter years it is minimal. For the propagation and preservation of the Prophet’s ﷺ teachings, Allāh ﷻ destined for a number young companions to carry out the great task. Abū Hurayrah, Anas ibn Mālik, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar, Jābir ibn ‘Abdullāh and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ﷺ were some of the young companions who have narrated the most ahādīth from the Prophet ﷺ and who have conveyed many of his teachings to the generation that followed them. These young men preserved as much as they could from staying in the company of the Prophet ﷺ, but matters related to the Prophet’s ﷺ private, marital and domestic life could only be known by a wife. Allāh ﷻ chose ‘Ā‘ishah ﷺ for this important role. Young and highly intelligent, she is amongst those companions who have narrated the most ahādīth from the Prophet ﷺ. Her contribution is so significant that if her narrations were to be taken out from the books of hadīth there would be great difficulty in understanding some matters.

We can conclude from this brief discussion that the Prophet ﷺ was not a person led by his desires, that ‘Ā‘ishah ﷺ was mentally and physically developed enough for marriage, that it was the custom among the Arabs for girls to marry at a young age and finally that the Prophet’s ﷺ marriage to ‘Ā‘ishah ﷺ was motivated by religious duty only.

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The Prophet's Marriage to A'ishah

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