

Rereading Hadith and women (Part I)

The first hadith is about the narrative that presents the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as an unequaled model of sexual performance, capable of satisfying all his wives (eleven) in a single night. This hadith is recorded in Bukhari's work, where it is noted that Anas ibn Malik reported that: "*The Prophet used to go around (kana yaduru 'ala nisa'ih) to his wives at an hour of the night and morning, and they numbered eleven.*" He said, "*I asked Anas: 'How could he bear that? (awa kana yutiquh?)'*" Anas replied: "*We used to say (kunna natahaddathu) that he had been given the strength of thirty men.*"¹

Let us first try to examine this hadith from a literal point of view. To begin with, it is not the Prophet speaking. It is a Companion, Anas ibn Malik, who appears to be reporting the facts and who testifies that the Prophet used to go around to his wives at an hour of the night and morning. The Arabic phrase (*kana yaduru 'ala nisa'ih*) does not in any way refer to conjugal relations; the Arabic term *yaduru* comes from *dara*, which literally means to make a round or to move about. The Prophet would therefore visit his wives at a certain hour—unspecified in this hadith—of the night or day.

In the second part of the hadith, someone asks Anas ibn Malik a question, apparently surprised to see the Prophet making this round of all his wives, and Anas replies that "we used to say (*kunna natahaddathu*) that he had been given the strength of thirty men." This is an observation made following a discussion; the "we" indicates that a conversation took place and that some said: "he had been given the strength of thirty men..." . Once again, it is not the Prophet speaking, and this last expression does not specify who might have given him this strength. Was it physical, moral, or psychological strength? What at least seems apparent is that at no point does this hadith refer to conjugal sexual performance.

We are here dealing with a narrative account of the Prophet's life, not with "a saying" of the Prophet himself, and it is therefore probably a matter of personal, deductive interpretation—an interpretation which, unfortunately, once again fits within the framework of theological commentaries of a misogynistic character, devised by men who wanted to forge this mythical image of a "superhuman" prophet endowed with unsurpassable virile prowess, surely a product of their imagination.

This is, moreover, confirmed by the extensive literature and numerous commentaries by traditionists who justify this hadith through a series of other accounts from the tradition glorifying the fantastical sexual exploits of other prophets, such as the Prophet Solomon. Among others, there is a hadith recorded in Sahih Bukhari and Muslim in which the Prophet Solomon was able to have conjugal relations with a hundred women at the same time²! Some commentators thus justify this kind of hadith by supposed gifts and privileges granted by God to His prophets, including Muhammad , who, like the other messengers, and because he deserved it more than others, also had the right to this unequaled sexual ability³.

¹ Sahîh Bukhari, *kitab al-ghasl*

² Hadith reported by Abu Hurayra, in Sahih Bukharî N°5242 and Sahih Muslim n°1654.

³ See the explanations and supporting evidence given regarding this hadith in this portal specializing in legal opinions: <https://islamqa.info/ar>; Question No. 280430.

Another argument that could be made to deconstruct this interpretation is the presence of other hadiths demonstrating how the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to spend the night with each of his wives as fairly as possible⁴. In a hadith reported by his wife Aisha, she says the following: "The Prophet made no distinction between us [his wives]; he divided his nights among us equitably, and it was rare to see him make his round to all his wives at the same time, and when he did, he would remain for a while without conjugal relations (*min ghayr missas*), until he reached the one with whom he was to spend the night."⁵

It should also be recalled that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) only had eleven wives toward the end of his life; in other words, this hadith was reported at a time when he was already no longer in the prime of youth, and it is precisely around this period that many accounts describe his practice of prayer and worship during his nights rather than any supposed practice of frenetic sexual activity. This is shown by a hadith which states: "The Prophet spent his nights in prayer until his feet or legs swelled, and when he was reproached for this he would reply: 'Should I not be grateful to God for His kindness toward me?'"⁶

This obviously does not mean that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had no sexual life with his wives. Many accounts speak of it, and it is indeed in this sense that he tried to educate those around him, particularly men, about the need for a proper balance between their occupations and various responsibilities, the time devoted to ritual worship, and the time devoted to the pleasures of married life. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) taught moderation in all areas; this was his philosophy of life, and he never stopped teaching this moderation to those around him, particularly the men, who were known for customs marked by tribal harshness.

How, then, can we tolerate this kind of interpretation, which runs counter to the spiritual philosophy the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) advocated throughout his life— one of moderation, restraint, and harmony?

These erroneous interpretations merely reflect an perpetual imagination that instrumentalizes the figure of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as a model of supernatural virility in order to justify exalted sexual fantasies disgraceful of the ethical Prophet's personality, his sobriety, and his legendary sensitivity.

⁴ See Hadiths reported by Ibn el Bar, in "al-istidhkar" 1/300 and other hadiths reported by Aisha on the same subject of the equitable distribution of nights for each wife.

⁵ Hadith reported in Musnad Ahmed N°24765 and Abu Daoud N°2135.

⁶ Hadith reported by Aicha in Sahih Bukhari , kitab al'tafsîr, « *tafsîr sourate al-fath* ».