

MUHAMMAD, AISHA, ISLAM, AND CHILD BRIDES

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INTRODUCTION

Muhammad was 52 and Aisha was 9 when they married and sexually consummated their marriage. Muhammad followed an Arab custom in marrying a child who had her first menstrual cycle. This action must be questioned, regardless of it being a cultural norm, because Muhammad's action and teachings on marriage established an Islamic precedent: a girl is judged an adult following her first menses, and is eligible for marriage and sexual relations. Thus Muslim men are allowed to marry and have intercourse with young girls who have happened to have an early first menstrual cycle. As will be shown, this leads to physical and psychological damage to the child.

Muhammad's first wife - Khadija, died a few years before he fled to Medina. Later, he was encouraged to take another wife. At the age of 49 he was betrothed to Aisha, age six. Aisha was his closest friend's, Abu Bakr's, daughter. At that time, she had already been betrothed to another man but by mutual consent the betrothal was dissolved. Three years later, following her first menstrual cycle, he then formally married and sexually consummated his marriage with her.

Most Western people, and all "humane" thinking and responsible parents anywhere in the world know it is not in a 9 year old girl's best interest to engage in marriage and sexual relations with a 52 year old man, regardless of the cultural setting. We know that, in our culture today, a person doing such a thing could possibly be sent to prison for sex with a minor, statutory rape, or other related laws. Most of us find it questionable for Muhammad, a self-proclaimed prophet of God, to do such a thing. We expect a real prophet to know better, or at least hear from God on the matter.

What is more critical than Muhammad's single action with Aisha is that he taught that a girl is considered an adult following her first menstrual cycle. He also taught that his followers were to follow his "sunnah" or lifestyle. Thus today, throughout much of the Mideast, (and Africa where African's were forcefully converted to Islam), girls as young as nine are often married by men old enough to be their grandfather. (Somalia is a good example).

But why then do we find it objectionable? After all, Muhammad did not live in our culture or under our law. He lived under a Semitic culture. And this custom of marrying girls after their first menses existed in the Mideast long before Muhammad. What is the basis for rejection of this Semite custom and Muhammad's precedent?

Are there any valid reasons to criticize it? Or should it simply be rejected based upon our own cultural bias?

I'll address this and other issues in this paper, and a discussion of the consequences of his deed as well. However some fundamental groundwork needs to be laid before moving on. Aisha's actual age is the first point that needs to be established. Within the Islamic world there is division concerning Aisha's age when she sexually consummated her marriage. Many Muslims in the West have a hard time accepting Aisha was only a little girl of 9 when their "prophet" had sex with her. Some Muslims, and even Western writers, wrote that she did not have sex with Muhammad until she was 14 or so. I've never seen any textual Islamic support for their position, only conjecture. But the thought of their prophet committing such an act is embarrassing to them, so they invent, or re-write, documented Islamic history to make it more acceptable to their minds and the minds of other Western people as well.

EVIDENCE THAT AISHA WAS 9 WHEN HER MARRIAGE TO MUHAMMAD WAS CONSUMMATED

There are a number of sources, all written by Muslims, that detail Muhammad's marriage and consummation with his young child-bride - Aisha.

FROM THE HADITH OF SAHIH BUKHARI

I have used Bukhari's Hadith, translated into English by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, at the Islamic University in Medina. Bukhari's Hadith is considered authentic by the majority of Sunni Islamic scholars. It is second to the Quran in terms of importance. The central figure to approve and sign the translation is Dr. Amin Al-Masri, Ph.D. Cambridge University. He is the Advisor and Head of the Sharia Dept., at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in Mecca.

From Bukhari vol. 7, #65:

"Narrated Aisha that the prophet wrote the marriage contract with her when she was six years old and **he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old**. Hisham said: "I have been informed that Aisha remained with the prophet for nine years (i.e. till his death)."

Bukhari vol. 7, #88:

"Narrated Urwa: "The prophet wrote the **(marriage contract) with Aisha while she was six years old and consummated his marriage with her while she was nine years old** and she remained with him for nine years (i.e. till his death)."

Bukhari vol. 5, #234 says:

"Narrated Aisha: The prophet engaged me when I was a girl of six. We went to Medina and stayed at the home of Harith Kharzraj. Then I got ill and my hair fell down. Later on my hair grew (again) and my mother, Um Ruman, came to me while I was playing in a swing with some of my girl friends. She called me, and I went to her, not knowing what she wanted to do to me. She caught me by the hand and made me stand at the door of the house. I was breathless then, and when my breathing became all right, she took some water and rubbed my face and head with it. Then she took me into the house. There in the house I saw some Ansari women who said, "Best wishes and Allah's blessing and a good luck." Then she entrusted me to them and they prepared me (for the marriage). **Unexpectedly Allah's messenger came to me in the forenoon and my mother handed me over to him, and at that time I was a girl of nine years of age."**

FROM THE HADITH OF SAHIH MUSLIM VOLUME 2, #3309

Aisha reported: Allah's Messenger married me when I was six years old, **and I was admitted to his house at the age of nine....**

FROM THE HADITH OF THE SUNAN OF ABU DAWUD

Abu Dawud's Hadith is the third most respected Hadith in Islam.

From Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, #2116:

"Aisha said, "The Apostle of Allah married me when I was seven years old." (The narrator Sulaiman said: "Or six years."). **"He had intercourse with me when I was 9 years old."**

FROM THE HISTORY OF TABARI

Tabari wrote the most authentic Islamic history. It covers 39 volumes. Tabari was one of the greatest Islamic scholars and the greatest Islamic Historian.

From Tabari, volume 7, page7:

"....my marriage (to Muhammad) was consummated when I was nine...."

From Tabari, volume 9, page 131

"Then the men and women got up and left. The Messenger of God consummated his marriage with me in my house when I was nine years old. Neither a camel nor a sheep was slaughtered on behalf of me".....(The Prophet) married her three years before the Emigration, when she was seven years old **and consummated the marriage when she was nine years old**, after he had emigrated to Medina in Shawwal. She was eighteen years old when he died.

I also want to provide evidence from the best Islamic Ency. available in English, and other Islamic writers. They also acknowledge Aisha's age being 9.

FROM THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ISLAM, under "Aisha". (pub. by E.J. Brill).

"Some time after the death of Khadija, Khawla suggested to Muhammad that he should marry either Aisha, the 6 year old daughter of his chief follower, or Sawda Zama, a widow of about 30, who had gone as a Muslim to Abyssinia and whose husband had died there. Muhammad is said to have asked her to arrange for him to marry both. It had already been agreed that Aisha should marry Djubayr Mutim, whose father, though still pagan, was friendly to the Muslims. By common consent, however, this agreement was set aside, and Muhammad was betrothed to Aisha.... The marriage was not consummated until some months after the Hidjra, (in April 623, 624). Aisha went to live in an apartment in Muhammad's house, later the mosque of Median. **She cannot have been more than ten years old at the time and took her toys to her new home.**"

From the Muslim book "WOMEN IN ISLAM" by Said Abjullah Seif-Al-Hatimy, published by Islamic Publications in Lahore Pakistan:

"...(Aisha) She was the youngest of his wives. It is said that she was nine years of age when he married her."

SUMMATION OF THE EVIDENCE OF AISHA'S AGE

I've belabored the point. But because of the controversy within the Islamic world I had to document her age thoroughly. The most respected Hadith and Islamic scholars from early on until this present day state that Aisha was 9 when Muhammad engaged in sexual relations with her.

DEFINITION OF THE WORD TRANSLATED AS "CONSUMMATE"

There has been some confusion about the definition of the word "consummate". In Sahih Bukhari, vol. 7, #64, the root word used is "dakhala". From the Hans-Wehr Arabic-English Dictionary p273, it means "to enter, to pierce, to penetrate (sexually), to consummate the marriage, cohabit, sleep with a woman".

I have also asked two native Arabic speakers to confirm the definition of the word used in Bukhari. They read Bukhari in Arabic for themselves, and did indeed say it meant that Muhammad had sexual intercourse with Aisha when she was 9.

ISLAM AND THE AGE OF PUBERTY

Islam teaches that female puberty begins when the menses is started. From Bukhari, volume 3, Book of Witnesses, chapter 18, page 513:

"The boy attaining the age of puberty and the validity of their witness and the Statement of Allah:

"And when the children among you attain the age of puberty, then let them also ask for permission (to enter)." Quran 24:59.

Al Mughira said, "I attained puberty at the age of twelve." The attaining of puberty by women is with the start of menses, as is referred to by the Statement of Allah:

"Such of your women as have passed the age of monthly courses, for them the prescribed period if you have any doubts (about their periods) is three months... [65:4]

...Al-Hasan bin Salih said, "I saw a neighbouress of mine who became a grandmother at the age of twenty-one." [1]

[1] The note for this reference says, "This women attained puberty at the age of nine and married to give birth to a daughter at ten; the daughter had the same experience."

My understanding of the above is that Islam considers that when a child "attains", or begins, "puberty", then he / she is considered an adult. Hence the validity of the witness.

Muhammad followed a cultural norm in marrying and having sex with a young girl. After all, she was considered an adult. Not only did he do that, but he taught his followers to do as he did. Therefore is acceptable for Muslim men to marry and have intercourse with girls who have had their menarche. Muhammad established this cultural practice as a precedent in Islam.