

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

Living Quran
Wife 7 – Domestic Abuse

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Aim

We are still commenting on the Hadith Umm Zar', trying our best insha'Allah to connect this hadith to our current reality and checking our reality against the Islamic view of what is right and what is wrong. We're also trying to understand the oppression that we face from our communities.

Recap

Last time we talked about Wife 6, who was suffering from the behaviour of her husband. He eats and drinks in a disgusting way; he has no etiquettes in eating or drinking, or respecting his guests. On a daily basis her life with him is a struggle for her. She was also discussing another matter: she touched upon the issue of intimate relationship; he has no interest in her and is not fulfilling her rights.

Wife 7

Now we move on to Wife 7. Sometimes there are similarities between the wives' stories, and sometimes they bring up very new issues. Wife 7 says:

'My husband is a wrongdoer, and weak and foolish. All the defects are present in him. He may injure your head, or your body, or may do both.'

In fact, as we'll see, her words in Arabic are much more layered and have much more meaning than this limited translation suggests.

The worst husband

The word that is translated here to mean 'wrongdoer' – '*ghayayaa*' or '*ayayaa*' actually has many meanings. Scholars of linguistics also say it can mean impotent: 'the one who cannot have a relationship with women.' This is a similarity between this wife and the previous one. This might be one of the meanings, and we can see that she started with it. The previous wife started with her husband's eating habits, and we posed the question, why did she start with this? Most likely it's the most annoying thing to her about her husband. Here again, this wife is saying that her husband is not interested in her. He is not interested in women, and she is suffering from this. This is why she's offloading her burden to her friends. She's saying, if you think you have problems, look at mine. I'm probably in the worst situation of all.

Stupid

If her problems ended here, you might say they could be resolved, or tolerated to a certain extent. But no, she continues, and tells us he's also foolish '*tabaqaa*'. One of the meanings of this word is that his mind is closed, he's foolish and dim. And for sure, she's very stressed, disturbed, sad and annoyed.

Source of embarrassment

The word 'wrongdoer', can also mean like a cloud covering you '*ghayayaa*' derived from *ghayayah* a cloud. His stupidity is like a cloud; he cannot see or function properly. And this is embarrassing for her, in the community she might be known as the wife of the stupid person. Maybe they're the laughing-stock of their neighbours. Maybe they ridicule or taunt when they see her. And again, this is very stressful. She

might be suffering from depression and anxiety. Even if she's not suffering from a mental illness, she's surely sad, stressed, and angry.

Filled with defects

And then she goes on to say, 'all the defects in people are gathered in my husband.' For instance, he's dirty, he has bad character, he snores... it's a long list. She's summarising them for us by saying 'all the defects.' Maybe this isn't quite the case, but in her anger she's carried away by her emotions.

Hurtful

In other narrations it then says, 'If you were to talk to him, he will insult you. If you were to crack a joke with him, he will hit you and injure you. Or, he might do both.' The original narration uses two specific words '*shajjaki aw fallaki*' meaning 'injuries of the head' and 'injuries of the body'. Scholars have commented that she might not be using these words literally, it might be metaphorical. That he's so brutal and cruel in his words that it's as if he's causing you an injury. Sometimes, yes, you don't have to physically injure someone to hurt them. It might be that your tongue is stronger than a sharp object. I'm sure many of us still remember words said to us long ago that still cause us sadness when we remember them. These words are like scars in our heart, even though whoever said them didn't use a sharp object. So she's saying he's so brutal, he's so harsh, and this might be physical harshness, or it might be metaphorical – what we know today as emotional abuse.

Domestic abuse

Whatever the case verbally and emotionally, when we read this hadith it's obvious that what we have is domestic violence.

Obviously, this any abuse is completely wrong and *haram*. Islam is absolutely 100% against domestic violence. This wife is suffering from her husband. You can imagine the level of stress she's living in, as a wife. In another commentary, there is a comment on the word translated as foolishness.

Lack of consideration in the bedroom

There is also another meaning in the word foolishness, that when he sleeps with her, his chest is on her chest, and this makes her suffocate. His weight pushes down on her. Although she mentioned his lack of interest in her, she's saying that even when he tries, he fails.

We definitely have etiquettes; anyone who's married or getting married should know these. Men must not put their weight on their wives, this is not good.

Bottom line, she's complaining 100% about everything. And probably the most annoying thing to her is the lack of intimate relationship. I've come across many cases where, if one in the couple isn't satisfied in the bedroom, they'll both be miserable. Shouting, screaming, conflict, you name it. Of course this isn't the only thing which causes problems, but it is one of the big ones. She started with this because she's full of anger and stress.

Forced marriages

He has a bad character. She cannot speak with him and joke with him. He doesn't listen to her. And again, as usual, I pose the very same question: why on earth is she still in this marriage? And, if she knew that he was a stupid, foolish, violent person, why did she get into it in the first place? I can tell you the answer:

she was forced. Maybe he's a relative, or her father had already given his word, without asking her. Unfortunately this is still the case in some scenarios. Again, this is completely wrong.

Forced marriages are completely wrong. A young woman once came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him that her father had arranged to marry her to someone. The Prophet (peace be upon him) called upon her father and told him he couldn't do this without her acceptance. She said, in fact she did accept, but she had wanted to teach her fellow women that it was not up to their fathers. And there are many similar narrations in this direction. You need the couple's permission. You cannot force either her or him into a marriage.

Aisha narrated:

A girl came to her and said: 'My father married me to his brother's son so that he might raise his own status thereby, and I was unwilling.' She said: 'Sit here until the Prophet peace be upon him comes.' Then the Messenger of Allah peace be upon him came, and I told him (what she had said). He sent word to her father, calling him, and he left the matter up to her. She said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I accept what my father did, but I wanted to know whether women have any say in the matter.' (Nasa'i)

Importance of engagement (khitbah)

So in this scenario, we can infer that she has been forced into this. Maybe she had no opportunity to speak to him before the wedding. Probably they had no *khitbah* (engagement) period, when the couple sits together, of course in the presence of a *mahram*, and have the opportunity to chat and determine whether they want to spend their lives with each other. In past generations, the first time a couple met was on their wedding day. This is *haram*. At least, they should meet each other beforehand and have a chance to decide if they can get along. In this case, probably she was dropped on his doorstep as though by a postman, and that's that. And there's no return policy, because in the *jahiliya* time – and unfortunately, we still have some *jahiliya* in the twenty first century – divorce was unlimited.

Conflict within the home

So she's in this marriage. He has problems with his temper, he's a violent person, he's insulting and uses bad language. How can she live with this? And unfortunately, we have many of these such problems in our community. Why are stabbings and knife crimes increasing so dramatically in London, and perpetrated by youngsters? One of the big reasons – not the only one – but one of the reasons is broken families. Violence inside the house, maybe these young people have been kicked out of the house. Maybe literally, or maybe they've been driven away by the problems and conflict that are inside the house. So they will just go and do anything to get out. They might be involved in drugs, or theft, you name it, just to leave the house. It all goes back to how tranquil the house is. If we have tranquillity, this protects our children. Unfortunately, many wives, under so-called *sabr*, accept this violence and abuse and say they're sacrificing themselves for the sake of their children. In fact, they are damaging their children, and creating a pattern which will last in the family.

Sabr does not mean being a victim

When you just accept being a victim and don't defend yourself, and just stay in this unhealthy relationship, you are destroying your family. This is not patience; there is a very thin line between patience and weakness. There is a taboo in this community that we cannot call the police about our own

husband, he's my family. But if he's not stopping, if he keeps harming you, you have to protect your family. He has to be stopped. You have the right to live with peace and tranquillity. Allah Almighty mentioned in the Quran, 'among his signs he created for you mates from among yourselves, to dwell with them in tranquillity.' (30:21) Tranquillity is the core of a marriage, the core of the family. If you have no *sukoon*, you cannot have a healthy family.

Ending abusive relationships

What we see here, she's addressing domestic violence. And we still have this in the community. And many people wrongly assume that they have to take it. This is wrong. This is weakness, this is destroying your family, this is *haram*. I see that your intentions are good. You don't want social services to come and take your children, you don't want the police to come. But it's not always a bad ending. We need to stop this pattern and find an exit. And that may well be divorce, if things can't be rectified. Of course we do not encourage divorce. But sometimes we need to generate a lesser evil to avoid the bigger evil.

Abuse is completely haram

Of course, I cannot generalise every case like this. But domestic violence is a serious issue, and we need to fight this. And those who cannot understand, we need to send them a message that this is unacceptable and *haram*. Her husband is entertaining himself by hitting her and causing her injuries.

Some commentators have said that the word we translated as 'body injury' can also mean taking her money or kicking her out of the house. So we can add to the list that he is so violent with her that he sometimes kicks her out; he abuses her whenever he wants. This is why she summarises him as containing 'all the defects'.

Stigma of divorce

Any one of the things she mentions is enough to break a marriage: the violence, the impotence, abusive in his language... He has no communication with her, he has bad character, you name it. It's the same old story. Why is she still in this marriage? It's the oppressive culture and community. The stigma around divorce, asking her how she could report him, telling her she should tolerate this. Some women think that staying in such a marriage is less harmful to her than going and facing the community. No. You have to face the community. Even your *deen* deteriorates because of this. You need to save yourself and your family from this relationship. Of course we shouldn't go for divorce because of a single conflict. But when it comes to domestic violence, this is a red light. We can't cross it. Of course the best-case scenario is not to have any fighting, but in the worst-case scenario you need to defend yourself.

Fighting bad cultural practices when they are oppressive

So we need to fight oppression. If we accept oppression and say, this is the culture, we can't do anything, then of course nothing will change. But if we insist that we can face this, then we can make the change that we need. This is our obligation. We do not want our children to inherit bad actions from the culture. We cannot accept the culture dominating when its practices are against *shariah* and against common sense. We cannot justify it at all.

We ask Allah Almighty to enable us to understand and apply our *shariah*, and not follow the cultural practices that can lead to suffering and oppression. Don't postpone facing your reality. If there's an abusive marriage, then don't stay in it.

Seek support

Go and seek support. Sometimes people might deal with this in a very simple way, saying that by doing *salah* and *dua* the problem will go away. Of course we still need to do *dua* and *salah*, but if there's a problem we still need to deal with it. It is your right to live in *sukoon* and tranquillity.