

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

SUCKLING OF THE BREASTS OF WOMEN TO BECOME THEIR 'MEHRAM'

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This may prove a difficult piece for some of you to read so reader discretion is advised. Many readers who understand the nature of [Islamic secondary sources](#) such as the Ahadith corpus, Islamic jurisprudence, its development and how at times it stands at odds with Quranic injunctions and its overarching message will not be so perturbed.

However, those not so conversant with the sources and have somewhat placed blind trust in Ahadith leaning on what they have learnt from their Islamic leaders, imams and sheikhs may be a little disturbed by the contents.

Having noted this, there is no hiding what is being practiced (amongst so many other practices) in the name of Islam. I implore the reader to conduct their own research on the topic which will open the doors for some of the most preposterous and incredulous explanations that are given in an attempt to defend such practices. This article exposes one such example of how Ahadith can not only damage the essence of the Quranic message but also deters those initially interested in Islam to become apathetic towards it.

SUCKLING OF THE BREAST OF OTHER WOMEN TO BECOME THEIR MEHRAM

According to some Muslim scholars, if an **older male** (passed the age of puberty) and not tied by kinship desires to become a 'mehrām' (of unmarriageable kin) of another woman, he is required to drink her breast milk. The suggestions on how to remove the breast milk and how much to drink depends on which Islamic scholar one consults.

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THIS JUDGMENT BY ISLAMIC SCHOLARS?

ANSWER: [Islamic secondary sources](#)

Unfortunately, this is a reality and this practice is advocated in Islam. Please find below a news article which captures such a religious sanction from a 'learned scholar' in the form of an exposé

Saudi Arabia: [Cleric in hot seat after calling for women to give men breast milk to avoid illicit mixing](#)

Please also find below well known Ahadith on which the fatwas are based. I quote the references below for your own perusal and quote one of the more comprehensive Hadith which covers the complete narrative. This is from a very respected Islamic secondary source, The Muwatta of Imam Malik. The number of sucklings vary from Ahadith to Ahadith with some asserting the number of times the suckling should occur to be ten.

The reader will find similar sentiments of the Hadith reflected in other Ahadith. Examples are:

Sahih Muslim (Book 008, Number 3424; 3425; 3426; 3427; 3428) and Imam Malik's Muwatta (Book 30, Number 30.1.7; 30.1.8; 30.2.12; 30.2.13; 30.2.14)

SUCKLING OF OLDER PEOPLE

According to Imam Malik, the Prophet told Sahla bint Suhayl to allow a grown man called Salim to suckle from her breasts. This instruction was advanced with a view to allow Salim to become Sahla bint Suhayl's 'mehram'. We are further required to believe that as a grown man Salim completed this task from Sahla. Furthermore, we are informed that Aisha (The prophet's alleged wife) told her sister Umm Kalthum and the daughters of her brother to give milk to any grown man who wanted to come and see her.

Malik's Muwatta Book 30, Number 30.2.12:

“Yahya related to me from Malik from Ibn Shihab that he was asked about the suckling of an older person. He said, “Urwa ibn az-Zubayr informed me that Abu Hudhayfa ibn Utba ibn Rabia, one of the companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who was present at Badr, adopted Salim (who is called Salim, the mawla of Abu Hudhayfa) as the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, adopted Zayd ibn Haritha. He thought of him as his son, and Abu Hudhayfa married him to his brother's sister, Fatima bint al-Walid ibn Utba ibn Rabia, who was at that time among the first emigrants. She was one of the best unmarried women of the Quraysh. When Allah the Exalted sent down in His Book what He sent down about Zayd ibn Haritha, ‘Call them after their true fathers. That is more equitable in the sight of Allah. If you do not know who their fathers were then they are your brothers in the deen and your mawali,’ (Sura 33 ayat 5) people in this position were traced back to their fathers. When the father was not known, they were traced to their mawla”

“Sahla bint Suhayl who was the wife of Abu Hudhayfa, and one of the tribe of Amr ibn Luayy, came to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and said, ‘Messenger of Allah! We think of Salim as a son and he comes in to see me while I am uncovered. We only have one room, so what do you think about the situation?’ The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Give him five drinks of

your milk and he will be mahram by it.' She then saw him as a foster son. A'isha umm al-muminin took that as a precedent for whatever men she wanted to be able to come to see her. She ordered her sister, Umm Kulthum bint Abi Bakr as-Siddiq and the daughters of her brother to give milk to whichever men she wanted to be able to come in to see her. The rest of the wives of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, refused to let anyone come in to them by such nursing. They said, 'No! By Allah! We think that what the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, ordered Sahla bint Suhayl to do was only an indulgence concerning the nursing of Salim alone. No! By Allah! No one will come in upon us by such nursing!'

"This is what the wives of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, thought about the suckling of an older person." [1]

WHAT DOES THE QURAN SAY?

Needless to say that the above concept **does not** exist in the Quran.

However, the Quran does mention that those women that suckled you **as a baby** (wet nurse) are those that are forbidden to you in marriage. The Quran refers to them with the honourable title: 'The Mothers who suckled you'.

004:023 (Part)

"...Mothers (women) (Arabic: ummahatukum) you gave you suck as a child (Nurse maids) (Arabic: Arda'nakum) are forbidden to you in marriage, as are your foster sisters"

أُمَّهَاتِكُمُ الَّتِي أَرْضَعْنَكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتِكُمُ

Arda'nakum

Ummahatukum(u)

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Note the Arabic word: 'Arda'nakum' which comes from the root word: **Ra-Dad-Ayn** which means he suckled the breast of his mother (said of a child), to suckle, suckling woman or wet nurse.

The wet nurse is different from one's **biological** mother who is referred to specifically in the opening verse of this Surah (Chapter 4) as the **first** prohibition.

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَاتِكُمُ

ummahatukum
(your mothers)

hurrimat
(forbidden)

Illustration - Joseph Islam

FINAL THOUGHTS

Unfortunately, some [Islamic secondary source](#) narratives such as the ones noted above have made a complete mockery out of not only the Quran, but also the special relationship of 'suckling' that exists between a child and its honoured mother.

This practice has sadly been extended to grown adults by the use of narratives outside the Quranic text and given religious sanction.

The Quran only makes mention of 'suckling' in the capacity of mothers (biological and wet nurses). The Quran does not support any other practice as that intimated by the Ahadith and fatwas (religious rulings) noted above.

REFERENCES

[1] MALIK'S MUWATTA, Book 30, Section: Suckling of Older People, Number 30.2.12, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], English translation available at <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muwatta/030.mmt.html> [Accessed 13th April 2011] Highlights in bold are my own.

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