

Objections to Mutah - “Mere Physical Pleasures”

Introduction To The Series

If you're a Shia living in the West, if you've heard about mutah, chances are it's been in a negative context. How many times have you heard that “mutah is a last resort, after abstinence”, or “mutah is just about physical pleasures” (as if to say such a goal is wrong in of itself), or “the Imams never did mutah”, or “why can't you just *control* yourself?” and other such sayings as objections to mutah? These are common tropes in our community, and I would like to address all such objections to mutah.

The problem is, these attitudes stem from an unislamic worldview. The fact that there are *moral* objections to something *halal* is proof enough for this. To disagree with something Allah has allowed is to question the Wisdom of Allah. To further call it *immoral* is to call *Allah* immoral. Knowingly doing so teeters dangerously close to the edges of kufr, and as such, these attitudes towards mutah *ought* to change.

There are serious consequences to upholding the mutah taboo. A teacher of mine used to say: “*if we block the doors to halal, then the people will kick down the doors of haram.*” It is no secret that among the Western Muslim youth, pornography, masturbation, and illicit dating are not just common problems, they are *ubiquitous*. As a Muslim, living in the West, knowing the lustful culture of the West, seeing that women here dress two steps from nude, knowing how easy it is to access haram, how can you justify barring Muslim youths from halal, *knowing* that they will fall into haram if they do not have an option?

If we acknowledge this, there are only two possibilities for why you may object to mutah. One, you have a moral system that is *other* than Islam. Or two, you may think that the problems among the youth facing sin are either not that big of a deal or you believe that it is not that common. If you think it is not a big deal that the youth are facing sin, and you do not genuinely care about helping the youth through these difficulties, then you are not much more than Muslim by name. And if you think that sin is not so common, or if you believe “my child is not sinning”, you are naive.

This leaves us with the third option- unislamic worldviews. There is a saying in Farsi “it takes one insane person to drop a stone in a well, and ten intelligent men to pull it out”. It is easy for people to make claims such as “why can't

you control yourself?” but far more difficult to demonstrate why these objections are incorrect. Of course, they might *feel* correct to the one making them- but this is only because they have adopted a worldview which allows them to feel comfortable making such statements. Because answering these is tricky, I have made it my goal in this series to address as many moral objections as possible to mutah to help others wishing to do the same.

Part 1 - “Mutah is wrong because it’s just for physical pleasure”

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Posted May 3, 2015

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Why is such an act allowed? To form a temporary union with another party for the sole purpose of pleasure only for said union to dissolve in a matter of time. It's sick how many are considering it 'halal' and good for the Ummah! It literally parallels that of generalized western dating to where the couple forms a relationship with no real substance, eventually engage in non-marital sex, and if a baby accidentally results, a full commitment (marriage) may be the only option. In Mutah this exact same process follows.

It makes me sick that there are "Muslims" out there contracting Mutah for as short as one night. It is prostitution. And don't deny it is! You pay a woman something of some value to engage in "lawful" sexual intercourse for a certain interval of time.

I know there are certain forms of Mutah you can contract where restrictions may exist, but why is the Mutah specified above Islamically legal? Because a loose interpretation of one verse in the Qur'an allows for it?

Framing the Problem

Is there something wrong with marrying *purely* for the sake of physical pleasure? And for that matter, is there anything inherently wrong with physical pleasure itself? Typical objections to mutah assume that there is something wrong with one or both of these. We will address these in turn.

Is Marrying Solely For the Intention of Physical Pleasure Incorrect?

For the sake of argument, let's assume that mutah for the sole intention of physical pleasure is incorrect. Here we must be careful about what *kind* of incorrect this intention is: is this intention *prima facie* incorrect (only at first, but can be made correct by other factors), or is this *all things considered* incorrect (there is nothing that can make such an intention correct)? Consider that if someone fears that they will fall into sin, marriage becomes *wajib*¹ on them. If something is made *wajib*, it would be incorrect *not* to do so. Therefore we *cannot* say that marriage for the sole intention of physical pleasure is *all things considered* incorrect, at *worst* we can only say that this is *prima facie* incorrect. Since, if someone is sinning or fears that they will sin, it would be *haram* for them *not* to marry, *even if* their intention is simply to create an outlet for physical pleasure. This renders any objections to marriage with the sole intention of physical pleasure, *even if true*, completely moot and irrelevant.

¹ Per Sistani: Ruling 2461. *It is obligatory for someone who falls into sin on account of not having a wife to get married.*

Second, if someone is doing mutah to avoid sins such as gazing on the opposite sex, talking to the opposite sex, pornography, masturbation, how can one say that this is marriage with the intention of physical pleasure in the first place? Is this not marriage to strengthen and support one's religion instead? We as Muslims should celebrate the efforts of others to avoid sins and do more good deeds. Therefore, if someone is marrying to *avoid* sins, this should be *praised*, not criticised. Therefore, if someone is seeking a halal outlet for their desires, and attempting to distance themselves from haram ones, it would be completely incorrect to criticise them.

Finally, the premise that it is incorrect to seek marriage with the sole intention of pleasure is simply *not true in the first place*. One must consider that the very purpose of mutah's² creation was as an outlet for the physical needs of the soldiers in the Prophet's (saw) army!

Narrated 'Abdullah: We used to participate in the holy battles led by Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and we had nothing (no wives) with us. So we said, "Shall we get ourselves castrated?" He forbade us that and then allowed us to marry women with a temporary contract (2) and recited to us: -- 'O you who believe ! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful for you, but commit no transgression.' (5.87) (Bukhari)

I challenge anyone reading this article to bring forth *one* opinion of any of our ulema which says pursuing marriage as an outlet for one's physical desires is incorrect. Rather, our ulema say the *opposite* of this:

These parents [who prevent their children from marriage] endanger the future of their darling children seriously! Many parents who have spent their own youth with all its problems and troubles and are unaware of the storm existing in hearts of the youth (both girls and boys) for proper satiation of their sexual instincts, are very 'cool' and or 'strict' for the marriage of their sons and daughters. Their 'coolness' and 'strictness', both branching from a single mental origin, are sometimes so that they call one year and five years delay 'a simple event and short term'. They ignore that even a month or several days of delay in critical situations may change the fate of a youth. It is not clear why these parents do not remember their youth? (Makarem)

Is There Something Dirty About Liking and Wanting Sex?

² In fact, the word mutah itself literally means *enjoyment*.

If you are still unconvinced that marriage for the sole purpose of physical pleasure is acceptable, perhaps you may be considering sex *itself* as something dirty or shameful. It follows that if sex is dirty, then to marry for this purpose is also dirty. However, to view sex as dirty, sinful, or shameful is simply *unislamic*.

First of all, Islam *encourages* us to have sex, and as much of it as we would like within the bounds of marriage:

Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers. (Quran 2:223).

In fact, of the few pleasures the Prophet (saw) enjoyed most was having frequent, regular, and playful intercourse with his wives:

*Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa from Mu'ammār ibn Khallad who has said the following: "I once heard al-Rida', 'Alayhi al-Salam, saying, 'Three things are of the traditions of the Messengers (of Allah): use of perfume, trimming hairs and **ampleness of (relation in) marriage.**" (Al Kafi)*

Ali ibn Ibrahim has narrated from his father from ibn abu 'Umayr from Hafs ibn al-Bakhtariy who has said the following: "Abu 'Abd Allah, 'Alayhi al-Salam, has said that the Messenger of Allah, O Allah, grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to Your cause, has said, 'I do not love anything from your world except women and perfume.'" (Al Kafi)

And even according to reports, the Imam was unashamed and unabashed at *publicly* mentioning that he especially enjoyed having sex:

Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Salmah ibn al-Khattab from Ali ibn Hassa'n from certain persons of our people who has said the following: "We once asked abu 'Abd Allah, 'Alayhi al-Salam, 'What is the most enjoyable thing We said other things. He (the Imam) said, 'The most enjoyable of things is sexual intercourse with women.'" (Al Kafi)

In one report, another man came to the Imam (as) asking him if he was permitted to kiss his wife's vulva as foreplay:

Imam Musa al-Kazim (A.S.) was once asked, “Can a person kiss his wife’s vagina?” The Imam (A.S.) said, “No problem.” (Wasail as Shia)

The Imam (as) did not shame the questioner, nor did he consider the question inappropriate or unbefitting of his presence. This was perfectly normal to ask, and perfectly normal to want.

In another report, a man comes to the Prophet (saw) complaining that his penis is too large for women to handle, asking for a solution:

“Abu ‘Abd Allah, ‘Alayhi al-Salam, has said that once a man came to the Holy Prophet, O Allah, grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to Your cause, and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I carry the largest thing that man carry, if I can make use of the animals that I own, like a donkey or she-camel, because women cannot bear what I have.’ The Messenger of Allah said, ‘Allah has not created your thing without creating what can match your kind.’ The man went and very shortly came back to the Messenger of Allah and repeated what he had said before. The Messenger of Allah, O Allah, grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to Your cause, said, ‘Why do you not find the black woman with a tall neck and healthy body?’ He went and very shortly came back and said, ‘I testify that you are the Messenger of Allah in all truth. I searched for what you commanded me to do and found her to be of my kind and match and I am satisfied.’”
(Al Kafi)

Here we don't see the Prophet (saw) shying away from the man or shaming him for bringing such topics forward. Instead we see the Prophet empathizing with the man, and attempting to find him a solution so that he can have an outlet for his desires.

In fact, in another report, the Imam (as) asks Zurarah (ra), his most trusted companion, on how he deals with his sexual desires:

Zurarah (ra) entered into the room in which Imam Sadiq (as) was, and the Imam said “oh Zurarah, are you married?” Zurarah responded, “no”, the Imam replied: “what prevents you from this [getting married]?” Zurarah replied: “because I do not know whether or not to marry these women”, the Imam then asked: “then how do you stay patient while you are a young man?” so Zurarah responded: “I purchase slave women [for intercourse]” (Kashshi)

In this report, the Imam (as) is almost speaking in a sort of disbelief- how could it be possible that the hot-blooded Zurarah is unmarried yet staying patient? Almost as if to suggest that sexual desires are a need like food and water. In fact, in other reports the Imams (as) affirm that sex is more than simply at the level of *wants*, but rather at the level of *needs*:

Imam 'Ali (A.S.) says, "When you intend to have sex with your wife, do not rush because the woman (also) has needs (which should be fulfilled)." (Wasail as Shia)

The Prophet (S) said, "Three people are cruel: ...a person who has sex with his wife before foreplay. (My note: as if to suggest that neglecting the pleasure of one's wife is to deprive her of something she needs, that this is a cruel and unjust action)" (Wasail as Shia)

In one report, a woman complains to the Prophet (saw) that her husband refuses to have sex with her:

Ibrahim al-Al-Ju'fiy who has said the following: "I once heard abu 'Abd Allah, 'Alayhi al-Salam, saying that the Messenger of Allah, O Allah, grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to Your cause, once went to the house of 'Umm Salamah, smelled a fine fragrance and asked, 'Had al-Hawla' come to you?' She replied, 'She is here, complaining against her husband.' Al-Hawla then came out and said, 'I pray to Allah to keep my soul in service for your cause, my husband turns away from me.' He (the Messenger of Allah) said, 'Use more perfume, O Hawla'. She said, 'I have not left any perfume without being tried to make him happy but he turns away from me.' He (the Messenger of Allah) then said, 'I wish he learns what he receives by coming forward to you.' She asked, 'What can he receive by being forthcoming to me?' He (the Messenger of Allah) said, 'If he comes to you he will be circled by two angels and he will be like one who has pulled his sword from its sheath in the way of Allah; and when he goes to bed with his wife, sins fall off of him like the falling of leaves from the tree and when he takes Ghusl (bath), he comes clean out of sins.'" (Al Kafi)

Had such a conversation taken place in front of a mullah today, we would surely be shocked and questioned the decency of the woman- but rather the Prophet (saw) listens intently and sides with the woman's case.

In another report, three women complained to the Prophet (saw) about their husbands, one complained about her husband not eating meat, the other complained about her husband not using perfume, but when the third woman complained that her husband does not have sex with her, the Prophet (saw) became so upset that he rose up publicly:

Abu 'Abd Allah, 'Alayhi al-Salam, has said, 'Three women came to the Messenger of Allah, O Allah, grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to Your cause, and one of them said, "My husband does not eat meat." The other one said, "My husband does not smell perfume." The other one said, "My husband does not go near the woman." The Messenger of Allah came out while his gown dragged behind him until he climbed on the pulpit, praised Allah and glorified Him; then said, "What has happened to certain people of my companions who do not eat meat, smell perfume and do not go near women. I however, eat meat, smell perfumes and go to women, thus, those who disregard my Sunnah are not of my people.'" (Al Kafi)

Note, these conversations are taking place *publicly*. There is no shame here, no dirtiness, nor sinfulness. The Prophet instead takes time to level with the situations of the women and to address their sexual concerns. We do not see the faulty cultural concept where women are meant to be seen as naive and ignorant and innocent, and meant to hide their enjoyment and need for sex. Rather we see an atmosphere of understanding, and openness, one where sexual desires are a means for gaining closeness to Allah!

If these reports make you uncomfortable, or if you disagree with them then you disagree with the morals and ethics of the Prophet (saw) and the Imams (as). Of course, the Prophet (saw) and the Imams (as) can never be wrong: if you disagree it is simply because your worldview and your assumptions about ethics and morality are incorrect.

Conclusion

Here we hope that both objections to mutah have been refuted, that the intention of marriage for the purposes of pleasure is incorrect, and that sexual desires are inherently sinful or dirty. However, these two only justify whether marriage for physical purposes is acceptable. It does not address whether the Islamic concept of marriage is physical or something greater in the first place. Marriage itself *cannot*, by its nature in Islam, whether temporary or permanent, be reduced to a mere physical transaction. It is inherently more than that.

Marriage in Islam is not *just* a physical union with a contract, and sex is not *just* pleasure. To view these two in this way is a secular way of thinking. Rather, these two are actually *ibadat*, which take on a broader metaphysical existence beyond just their physical forms. What exactly do I mean? Take this verse for example:

Marry off the single among you and those of your male and female slaves who are fit [for marriage]. If they are poor, God will provide for them from His bounty: God's bounty is infinite and He is all knowing. (24:32)

If we are coming from a secular perspective, getting married and having children are financial *burdens*. As such, this verse is almost 'supernatural'. What this means is that the marriage is *not* just a physical contract, but rather it is something in which *Allah is fully involved in*. Therefore, to view mutah in a simply a way for two people to squash their "shameful physical wants" is an affront to Allah- as if to suggest that Allah is not involved in this contract. In fact, our narrations say the opposite:

"Abu ' Abd Allah, 'Alayhi al-Salam, has said, 'Two Rak'at Salat (prayer) performed by a married person is more virtuous than seventy Rak'at Salat (prayer) performed by a non-married person.'" (Al Kafi)

How can one imagine that marriage can ever be a purely physical transaction when Allah rewards the one who is married more than who is not, and Shaytan is scared of one who is married more than one who is not, and Allah provides sustenance to one who is married more than one who is not? *Even if* one is getting married as an outlet for physical needs, their marriage is not reduced in meaning and weight because of this. Such a marriage, even if it is a mutah, is still a path for them to Allah, and for them to increase in their worship and closeness to Allah. To suggest, then, that mutah is purely a physical transaction is simply incorrect.

[Read Part 2 - "Why Not Just Permanent Instead?"](#)

[Zurarah](#)