175405 - Are dolls only for girls? Is it permissible to play with them after reaching puberty?

the question

I want to know on what grounds playing with dolls is permissible for those who have not reached puberty? In the commentary on the hadith: “I used to play with dolls in the presence of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) …” in Fath al-Baari, it says: Imam Ibn Hajar narrated the view of Imam al-Khattaabi, that playing with dolls is not like playing with other images concerning which there is a stern warning. Rather a concession was granted to ‘Aa’ishah concerning that because at that time she had not reached puberty. Then he said: I say: There may be some uncertainty with regard to suggesting that the reason was because she had not yet reached puberty, but it is possible, because at the time of the Khaybar campaign, ‘Aaishah was fourteen years old – either she had completed fourteen years, or had passed that age, or was close to it. But in the case of the Tabook campaign, she had definitely reached puberty. Thus the report of the one who said that this occurred at the time of the Khaybar campaign is more likely to be correct. End quote.

My question is: What if our mother ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had reached puberty at the age of ten, for example? What if this hadith is referring to the time of the Tabook campaign? In that case, playing with images would be something that is not only permissible for children. With regard to the hadith which speaks of our mother ‘Aa’ishah watching the Ethiopians playing on the day of Eid, what appears to be the case is that that happened after she had reached puberty. It is noted above in the hadith of Ibn Hibbaan that that happened when the delegation of the Ethiopians came, and they came in 7 AH, so her age at that time would have been fifteen years. End quote.

Here the question is: why does Imam Ibn Hajar regard the age of puberty as being fifteen years? Why did he ignore the fact that women could reach puberty much earlier than that?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

There are signs from which it may be known that males and females have reached puberty, which marks the time when they become accountable and the Pen begins to record their bad deeds; it is the sign that one has reached the age of maturity. The scholars did not differ with regard to the view that ihtilaam (emission of maniy, i.e., climax) for both men and women, when awake or when asleep, is a sign of puberty that is applicable to both males and females. They also did not differ with regard to the fact that menses is a sign of reaching puberty for females. With regard to a specific age – which is what concerns us here – the scholars differed concerning that, and there are several views:

1. According to the Shaafa'is and Hanbalis, and Abu Yoosuf and Muhammad among the Hanafis, puberty is reached for both males and females when completing fifteen years of age [lunar years].
2. According to the Maalikis, it is reached when completing eighteen years or, it was said, when starting the eighteenth year.
3. According to Abu Haneefah, puberty is reached for a boy when he turns eighteen, and for a girl when she turns seventeen.

See: al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah (8/192).

We should point out here that the scholars did not deny that puberty could occur in both males and females before that age, with the occurrence of any of the signs of puberty that are agreed upon – such as ihtilaam or menses – and those concerning which there is a difference of scholarly opinion – such as the growth of pubic hair. Rather the criterion of age for puberty is applicable when there is no other sign of having reached puberty. What this means is that everyone who reaches the age of fifteen has reached the age of accountability, even if none of the well-known signs have appeared, according to those scholars who regard reaching this age as a sign of puberty. But if any of those signs appear, even if it is many years before reaching that age, then the individual has reached puberty.

Based on that, what al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said about ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reaching puberty at the age of fifteen is the view of the Shaafa‘is and Hanbalis, and of two senior scholars of the Hanafi madhhab. There is nothing strange about that in one way, and on the other hand it is not denying that puberty may be reached before that age, taking into account that there is some considerable difference of scholarly opinion concerning this age or whether it may be used as the basis of an argument. But this is not the place to discuss that matter.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: When a person completes fifteen years, he has reached puberty. The evidence for that is the hadith of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, in which he said: I was presented to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) on the day of Uhud, when I was fourteen years old, and he did not give me permission to join the army. According to a saheeh report narrated by al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Hibbaan, he said: … Because he did not think that I had reached the age of puberty. I was presented to him on the day of al-Khandaq, when I was fifteen years old, and he let me join the army and decided that I had reached puberty. The point is the words “[he] decided that I had reached puberty,” because if we only look at the first report, the report of al-Bukhaari, some may argue that he did not give him permission to join the army, not because he had or had not reached puberty, but because he was not qualified to fight, either due to physical weakness or some other reason. But the report of al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Hibbaan indicates that he did not give him permission because he had not yet reached puberty, and when he did reach puberty, he gave him permission. Naafi‘ said: I came to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez when he was the caliph and told him about this hadith, and he said: This is the definition of puberty, and he wrote to his governors informing them of that.

Based on that, we say that if someone has reached the age of fifteen years, then he has reached puberty, even if he is small in stature, even if he has not experienced ihtilaam, and even if he does not have any pubic hair. It is possible for a person to be not accountable at the beginning of the day, and at the end of the day to be accountable: if he was born at midday, and completes fifteen years at midday, then he has reached puberty.

End quote from ash-Sharh al-Mumti‘ ‘ala Zaad al-Mustaqni‘ (9/296, 297).

Secondly:

With regard to making and keeping dolls at home, the majority of scholars think that that is permissible, even if they are in the shape of animate beings, and they regard that as an exception to the general prohibition on making and keeping three-dimensional images. This is in contrast to those who say that permissible children’s toys are those that are not in the shape of humans, and in contrast to those who say that this permission was abrogated by the hadiths which prohibit making and keeping three-dimensional images.

The evidence for the permissibility of that is two famous hadiths:

1. It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah said: I used to play with dolls in the presence of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and I had friends who would play with me…

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6130), who included it under the heading, Chapter on being cheerful towards people; and Muslim (2440).

1. it was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said:

It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came back from the campaign to Tabook or Khaybar and there was a curtain over her niche. The wind lifted the edge of the curtain and uncovered ‘Aa’ishah’s toy dolls. He said: “What is this, O ‘Aa’ishah?” She said: My dolls. He saw among them a horse with two wings made of cloth and he said: “What is this that I see in the midst of them?” She said: A horse. He said: “What is this that I see on it?” I said: Two wings. He said: “A horse with wings?” She said: Have you not heard that Sulaymaan had horses with wings? She said: And the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) smiled so broadly that I saw his eyeteeth.

Narrated by Abu Dawood (4932); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

For more information on this topic, please see the answers to questions no. 119056, 20325, 129324 and 9473.

Thirdly:

To whom was this permission given, in terms of gender and age? What appears to be the case is that this permission is not restricted to females; rather it is also permissible for males, but attention should be paid to the nature of the dolls or toys that are played with, so no one should play with girls' toys except girls, for example.

We have quoted above the evidence for females playing with toys in the hadith of 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

With regard to it being permissible for males:

It was narrated that ar-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidh ibn 'Afra' said: On the morning of 'Ashoora', the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) sent word to the villages of the Ansaar around Madinah, saying: "Whoever started the day fasting, let him complete his fast, and whoever started the day not fasting, let him complete the rest of the day (as if he is fasting)."

After that, we used to fast on this day, and we would make our children fast too, even the little ones, in sha Allah. We would make them toys made out of wool, and if one of them cried for food, we would give (that toy) to him until it was time to break the fast.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (1960) and Muslim (1136).

What also appears to be the case is that toys are basically permissible for small children, both males and females, as seen above in the report of ar-Rubayyi'. It was also narrated from 'Aa'ishah that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) married her when she was seven years old and she was taken to him as a bride when she was nine years old, and she took her dolls with her. He died when she was eighteen years old.

Narrated by Muslim (1422).

Al-Qaadi 'Iyaad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The words "and she took her dolls with her" mean the dolls that girls play with, because she was very young.

End quote from Ikmaal al-Mu'allim Sharh Saheeh Muslim (4/574).

With regard to the ruling on adults playing with such dolls, we have come across some who say that it is permissible, and some who deem it to be disliked (makrooh).

Badr ad-Deen al-'Ayni (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the hadith of 'Aa'ishah: How this hadith comes under the heading of being cheerful towards people is that the Messenger of Allah was being cheerful and kind towards 'Aa'ishah when he approved of her playing with dolls and sent her friends to her to play with her. 'Aa'ishah had not yet reached puberty, so this was a concession granted to her. However, it [playing with dolls] is still disliked for those who have reached puberty.

End quote from 'Umdat al-Qaari (22/170).

Al-Qaadi 'Iyaad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What has been narrated about playing with dolls applies to small girls, when the concession is granted in that case only.

End quote from Ikmaal al-Mu'allim Sharh Saheeh Muslim (6/635).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted – as mentioned by the sister who asked this question – from Imam Ibn Hibbaan and Imam an-Nasaa'i (may Allah have mercy on them) the view that playing with dolls is permissible for young women, without limiting that to those who have not yet reached puberty. Ibn Hajar followed that by noting that this is something that needs to be discussed further. From this it may be understood that [these two scholars] said that playing with dolls is permissible for all women in general. This view is the correct one.

What appears to be the case is that the hadith of 'Aa'ishah about the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) returning from Khaybar or Tabook and seeing her toys in her house, including the horse with two wings, provides strong proof that it is permissible for women to play with toys, even after puberty. At the time of the Khaybar campaign, which took place in 7 AH, 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was fifteen years old or more; at the time of the Tabook campaign, which took place in 9 AH, she was sixteen years old or more. In either case, she had reached puberty, as it is known about the people of that land that they reach puberty early. In fact, this was narrated from 'Aa'ishah herself. At-Tirmidhi (may Allah have

mercy on him) said: ‘Aa’ishah said: When a girl reaches the age of nine years, she is a woman. End quote from Sunan at-Tirmidhi (2/409). al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: This means – and Allah knows best – and when she gets her menses, then she is a woman. End quote from Sunan al-Bayhaqi (1/319).

See also the answer to question no. 122534.

It seems from this, and Allah knows best, that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had reached puberty some time before Khaybar. This view is more appropriate than the view that she did not reach puberty until she reached the age of fifteen.

Based on that, it may be said that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had toys and played with dolls both before and after reaching puberty, especially since we have not come across anything to indicate that she stopped playing with them after reaching puberty, or that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade her to do that, or anything to indicate that she got rid of her toys when she reached puberty. Nothing to that effect is seen in the hadiths and reports.

It is worth noting, however, that al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar did not categorically state in that story that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) have not reached puberty, as al-Khattaabi (may Allah have mercy on him) did. Rather he commented on it by saying “this is something that needs to be discussed further.” In fact elsewhere, and in the story of ‘Aa’ishah and the Ethiopians, it says that that happened in 7 AH – which is the year in which the campaign of Khaybar took place – and that she had reached puberty, and that at that time she was fifteen years old. Furthermore, it says in one place that she was sixteen years old. This was his refutation of Imam an-Nawawi’s view that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was still young and had not yet reached puberty at that time.

The text of the report is as follows:

It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah said: By Allah, I remember the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) standing at the door to my apartment when the Ethiopians were playing with their spears in the mosque of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah

be upon him), screening me with his cloak, so that I could watch their games, and he continued to stand there for my sake until I was the one who left. So you should understand the fondness that young girls have for amusement.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (443) and Muslim (892).

The words of al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar:

Al-Haafiz (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What appears to be the case is that this happened after she reached puberty. We have seen above in the report of Ibn Hibbaan that that happened when the delegation of Ethiopians came, and they came [to Madinah] in 7 AH. Thus her age would have been fifteen years. End quote from Fath al-Baari (2/445).

And he (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The words “the fondness that young girls have” refer to young women who are still close to the stage of childhood. In my commentary on the text in al-‘Eidayn I noted that at that time she was fifteen years old or more. End quote from Fath al-Baari (9/278).

And he (may Allah have mercy on him) said: We have noted above in the chapters on Eid the response of an-Nawawi to that, when he said that ‘Aa’ishah was below the age of puberty, or it happened before hijab was enjoined, and he supported his view with this part of the hadith. “So you should understand the fondness that young girls have for amusement.” But we noted above that which may refute this conclusion, which is that in some narrations of the hadith it states that this happened after the delegation of the Ethiopians came, and they came in 7 AH, at which time ‘Aa’ishah was sixteen years old, so she had reached puberty, and that happened after hijab was enjoined. End quote from Fath al-Baari (9/336, 337).

All of that supports the idea that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had already reached puberty at the time when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) returned from Khaybar and saw her toys in her house. It is further supported by the fact that even though ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had reached puberty, she still had inclinations like those of young girls for playing games that are permissible.

In al-Mawsooʻah al-Fiqhiyyah (12/121), after quoting the view of al-Khattaabi and Ibn Hajar's comment on it, it says:… This indicates that the concession is not limited to girls who have not yet reached puberty; rather it includes the stage after puberty, so long as there is a need for that. The reason for this concession is that this is training them to care for children. We noted above a report from al-Hulaymi which says that there is another reason for it, which is that boys like to be entertained and have fun, and this gives them more energy, strength and joy, a good upbringing and some learning. Based on that, this matter is not limited only to female children; rather it also includes male children. Among the scholars who clearly stated this was Abu Yoosuf. In al-Qunyah it is narrated from him that he said: It is permissible to sell toys and for children to play with them. What supports the permissibility of children playing with toys that have images – in addition to dolls – is what is proven in as-Saheehayn from ar-Rubayyiʻ bint Muʻawwidh al-Ansaariyyah (may Allah be pleased with her). End quote.

And Allah knows best.