111867 - Meaning of the lack in reason and religious commitment in women

the question

We always hear the hadith, “Women are lacking in reason and religious commitment” and some men quote it in order to annoy women. We hope that you can explain the meaning of the hadith.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “I have not seen any lacking in reason and religious commitment but (at the same time) more able to rob the wisdom of the wise, except one of you [women].” They said: How are we lacking in religious commitment and reason, O Messenger of Allah? He said: “Is not the testimony of a woman like half the testimony of a man?” They said: Yes. He said: “That is how she is lacking in reason. And when she menstruates, does she not refrain from praying and fasting?” They said: Yes. He said: “That is how she is lacking in religious commitment.” So the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained that her lacking in reason refers to her weak memory, and that her testimony must be supported by the testimony of another woman, in order to confirm the testimony, because she may forget, and add something to or take something away from her testimony, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And get two witnesses out of your own men. And if there are not two men (available), then a man and two women, such as you agree for witnesses, so that if one of them (two women) errs, the other can remind her” [al-Baqarah 2:282].

With regard to her lacking in religious commitment, that is because when she is menstruating or bleeding following childbirth, she does not pray or fast, and she does not make up the missed

prayers, so this is lacking in religious commitment. But this lacking is not something for which she is called to account or blamed, rather it is something that happens by the will of Allah; for He is the One Who has prescribed that out of kindness towards her and so as to make things easier for her, because if she were to fast during menses and nifaas, that would harm her. By His mercy Allah has prescribed that she should not fast at the time of menses and nifaas, and she should make it up after that.

With regard to prayer, at the time of menses she is unable to purify herself, so by His mercy Allah has prescribed that she should not pray, and the same applies to nifaas, and He has not prescribed that she should make it up, because making it up would be very difficult, as prayers are offered five times a day, and menses may last for several days, seven or eight or more, and nifaas may last as long as forty days. So by His mercy and kindness towards her, Allah has waived the duty of offering and making up prayers.

This does not mean that her reason is lacking entirely, or that her religious commitment is lacking entirely, rather the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained that the lack in her reasoning has to do with what may happen of her testimony not being accurate, and the lack in her religious commitment has to do with what may happen of her missing prayers and fasts at the time of menses and nifaas. But that does not imply that she is less than a man in everything, or that a man is better than her in everything.

Yes, the male gender is superior to the female gender in general, for many reasons, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means” [al-Nisa’ 4:34].

But a woman may sometimes surpass a man in many things. How often has a woman surpassed men in her reason, religious commitment and memory. What is narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) with regard to the female gender being inferior to the male gender in reason and religious commitment is from this point of view, which the Prophet (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained.

A woman may do a great deal of righteous deeds and thus surpass many men in her righteous deeds, fear of Allah and status in the Hereafter. She may have a great deal of interest in some matters and thus able to give proper testimony, better than that of some men in some issues in which she has an interest. She may strive in memorization and understanding these issues, thus becoming a reference point with regard to Islamic history and many other things. This is clear to anyone who studies the state of women at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and after that.

Thus it is clear that this lack does not mean that women cannot be relied on in narration (of hadith etc) or in giving testimony, if it is supported by another woman. It also does not mean that she does not fear Allah or that she cannot be among the best of Allah’s slave and the best of the female slaves of Allah, if she adheres strictly to Islam. Although fasting is waived for her at the time of menses and nifaas, she has to make it up, and even prayer is waived in her case, but she does not have to make it up. This does not imply that she is lacking in all things when it comes to fearing Allah, obeying His commands and becoming well-versed in matters that are of interest to her. It is a lack that is specific to reason and religious commitment, in the way that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained. So the believer should not accuse her of being lacking in all things, or of being weak in religious commitment in all aspects, rather it is a specific type of lacking that has to do with her religious commitment and reason, which has to do with accuracy of testimony and so on. So she should be treated fairly and the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) should be interpreted in the best possible manner. And Allah knows best.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him)