98414 - He is asking about the words of Ibraaheem (peace be upon him) to Ismaa’eel: “Change your doorstep”

the question

Is there a hadith on a man being told that he should change his doorstep if his wife utters a word of disrespect? Please help me find it (if it exists) and help me to understand the conext that it was used for.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The hadeeth to which the questioner refers is that in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told the story of Ibraaheem (peace be upon him) with the mother of Ismaa’eel (peace be upon him), when Ibraaheem al-Khaleel left her and her son at the sacred House of Allaah, and the events that followed.

This story was narrated by al-Bukhaari in full in his Saheeh. And Allaah has told us in the Qur’aan of some of the details of this story, such as in Soorat Ibraaheem, where He tells us that Ibraaheem left his wife and son in Makkah and went back to Syria as Allaah had commanded him to do, then he came back to Makkah when Ismaa’eel had grown up. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) tells us about his return to Makkah:

Ibn ‘Abbaas said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The mother of Ismaa’eel was pleased with that [the arrival of Jurhum in Makkah] as she loved the company of people. So they settled there and sent for their families who came and settled with them, so that some families became permanent residents there.

The child (i.e. Ismaa’eel) grew up and learnt Arabic from them and (his virtues) caused them to love and admire him as he grew up, and when he grew up, they gave one of their women to him in marriage.

The mother of Ismaa’eel died, then Ibraaheem came after Ismaa’eel had got married, to check on his family that he had left there, but he did not find Ismaa’eel there. When he asked Ismaa’eel’s wife about him, she said, ‘He has gone in search of our livelihood.’

Then he asked her about their way of living and their condition, and she replied, ‘We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution,’ complaining to him. He said, ‘When your husband comes, convey my greeting to him and tell him to change his doorstep.’

When Ismaa’eel came, it was as if he felt something out of the ordinary, so he asked his wife, ‘Did anyone come to you?’

She said, ‘Yes, an old man of such and such a description came to us and asked us about you and I told him. He asked about our state of living, and I told him that we were living in hardship and poverty.’

He said, ‘Did he advise you to do anything?’

She said, ‘Yes, he told me to convey his greeting to you and to tell you to change your doorstep.’

Ismaa’eel said, ‘That was my father, and he has ordered me to divorce you. Go back to your family.’

So, Ismaa’eel divorced her and married another woman from amongst them (i.e. Jurhum). Then Ibraaheem stayed away from them for as long as Allah willed, then he came to them again but did not find Ismaa’eel. So he came to (Ismaa’eel’s) wife and asked her about Ismaa’eel. She said, ‘He has gone in search of our livelihood.’

He said: ‘How are you doing?’ asking her about their sustenance and living.

She replied, ‘We are prosperous and well-off (i.e. we have everything in abundance),’ and she praised Allaah.

He said: ‘What kind of food do you eat?’ She said, ‘Meat.’ He said, ‘What do you drink?’ She said, ‘Water.’

He said, ‘O Allah! Bless their meat and water.’” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “At that time they did not have grain, and if they had grain, he would have also asked Allah to bless it for them.”

And he (the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “If someone has only these two things as his sustenance, his health and disposition will be badly affected, unless he lives in Makkah.” He (Ibraaheem) said: ‘When your husband comes, convey my greeting to him and tell him that he should keep firm his doorstep.’ When Ismaa’eel came back, he said, ‘Did anyone come to you?’ She said, ‘Yes, a good-looking old man came to me,’ and she praised him (and said) ‘He asked about you, and I told him. He asked about our livelihood and I told him that we were in a good condition.’ He said, ‘Did he give you any advice?’ She said, ‘Yes, he told me to convey his greeting to you and said that you should keep firm your doorstep.’

He said: ‘That was my father, and you are the doorstep. He has ordered me to keep you with me.’

Then Ibraaheem stayed away from them for as long as Allah wished, then after that he came when Ismaa’eel was sharpening his arrows beneath a tall tree near Zamzam. When he saw him, he stood up to greet him and (they greeted one another) as a father does with his son or a son does with his father. Then (Ibraaheem) said, ‘O Ismaa’eel! Allaah has given me a command.’ Ismaa’eel said, ‘Do what your Lord has commanded you to do.’ Ibraaheem said, ‘Will you help me?’ Ismaa’eel said, ‘I will help you.’

Ibraaheem said, ‘Allaah has ordered me to build a house here,’ and he pointed to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it.

Then they raised the foundations of the House (i.e. the Ka’bah). Ismaa’eel brought the stones and Ibraaheem was building, and when the walls became high, Ismaa’eel brought this stone and put it for Ibraaheem who stood on it and carried on building, while Ismaa’eel was handing him the stones, and both of them were saying, ‘Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Verily, You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower.’ [al-Baqarah 2:127]

Then both of them went on building and going round the Ka’bah saying: ‘Our Lord! Accept (this

service) from us. Verily, You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower’”

Narrated by al-Bukhaari in his Saheeh: The Book of the Prophets, “For Allaah did take Ibraaheem…”, no. (3113).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: The words “your doorstep” are a metaphor for his wife. He called her that because of her attributes, as she guards his gate and protects what is within.

This story teaches us a number of lessons, including the following:

1-Gratitude to Allaah is a cause of His blessing being increased, and ingratitude brings the opposite. This is clear from the fate of both women.

2-It indicates how a woman should be: content and accepting whatever provision Allaah grants her husband without being annoyed or displeased.

3-One should be careful to choose a good wife who will help him with regard to the hereafter.

And Allaah knows best.