2665 - Meaning of the hadith, “Treat women kindly”

the question

The hadith says, “Treat women kindly, for woman was created from a bent rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is the top part…” Please explain the meaning of this hadith, especially the phrase “and the most crooked part of the rib is the top part”.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

This is a saheeh hadith which was narrated by the two Shaykhs [al-Bukhaari and Muslim] in al-Saheehayn from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), from the hadith of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Treat women kindly, for woman was created from a bent rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is the top part, so treat women kindly.”

This is a command to husbands, fathers, brothers and others to treat women kindly and not to oppress them; to give them their rights and to guide them to do good. This is what is obligatory upon everyone, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Treat women kindly.” This is not altered by the fact that a woman may sometimes mistreat her husband or relatives with her words or actions, because she was created from a rib as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, and the most crooked part of it is the top. It is well known that the top of it is the part by which it is attached, so the rib will have some crookedness in it at that point, as is well known.

The meaning is that she will inevitably have some crookedness or shortcomings in her character. Hence it was narrated in another hadith in al-Saheehayn:

“I have not seen any lacking in rational ability and failing in religion but (at the same time) robbing

the wisdom of the wise, besides you [women].”

The point is that this is the ruling of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and it is narrated in al-Saheehayn from the hadith of Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him). What is meant by lacking in rational ability, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, is that the testimony of two women is equivalent to the testimony of one man. Failing in religion, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, means that women spend days and nights without praying, i.e., because of menstruation or post-childbirth bleeding. This is a shortcoming which Allah has decreed for them, and there is no sin on them because of that.

So women should accept this in the way that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) meant it, even if a woman is knowledgeable and pious, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not speak of his own whims and desires, rather that was a Revelation that was revealed to him, which he conveyed to the ummah, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“By the star when it goes down (or vanishes).

Your companion (Muhammad) has neither gone astray nor has erred.

Nor does he speak of (his own) desire.

It is only a Revelation revealed” [al-Najm 53:1-4]