27192 - Commentary on the hadeeth “Bad omens are to be found in a woman, a house and a horse”

the question

What is the meaning of the hadith of the Prophet (saaw) which states that there is an evil omen in the woman and the horse? Does it mean, that in general women and horses are evil?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is proven in the Sunnah is that it is forbidden to believe in bad omens (tatayyur) or warn others about them, and that this is a kind of shirk. For example, al-Bukhaari (5776) and Muslim (2224) narrated from Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is no ‘adwa (transmission of infectious disease without the permission of Allah) and no tiyarah (superstitious belief in bird omens), but I like optimism.” They said, “What is optimism?” He said, “A good word.”

Ahmad (4194), Abu Dawood (3910), al-Tirmidhi (1614) and Ibn Maajah (3538) narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn Mas’ood said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Tiyarah (belief in evil omens) is shirk.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

Ahmad (7045) and al-Tabaraani narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Amr said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever lets tiyarah stop him from doing something is guilty of shirk.” They said, “What is the kafaarah for that?” He said, “To say: Allahumma la khayra illaa khayruka wa laa tayra illaa tayruka wa laa ilaaha ghayruka (O Allah, there is no good except Your good, no birds (omens) except from You, and there is no god beside You).” [Classed as hasan by al-Arna’oot and as saheeh by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Jaami’, no. 6264]

Al-Tabaraani narrated in al-Kabeer from ‘Imraan ibn Husayn that the Messenger of Allah (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “He is not one of us who practices augury [seeking omens in birds] or has that done for him, or who practices divination or has that done for him, or who practices witchcraft or has that done for him.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Jaami’, no. 5435.

Al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Sharh Muslim, no. 2224:

Tatayyur (belief in bad omens) is pessimism, and is based on something disliked, be it a word or action or something seen… They used to startle birds to make them move; if they went to the right they would regard that as a good omen and go ahead with their journeys or other plans, but if they went to the left they would cancel their journeys and plans, and regard that as a bad omen. So it would often prevent them from doing things that were in their interests. Islam cancelled out all that and forbade it, and said that it had no effect, whether good or bad. This is what is meant by the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “There is no tiyarah (superstitious belief in bird omens),” and in another hadeeth, “Tiyarah is shirk” – i.e., the belief that it can bring benefit or harm, if they act upon it believing that it has any effect, then this is shirk, because they think that it has an effect on what one does or that it can make things happen.

This is the basic principle regarding bad omens (tatayyur). But there are ahaadeeth which indicate that a bad omen may be in a woman, a house or a horse.

Al-Bukhaari (5093) and Muslim (2252) narrated from ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Bad omens are in a woman, a house and a horse.”

Al-Bukhaari (5094) and Muslim, (2252) narrated that Ibn ‘Umar said: Mention of bad omens was made in the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “If bad omens are to be found in anything, it is in a house, a woman and a horse.”

Abu Dawood (3924) narrated that Anas ibn Maalik said: A man said: “O Messenger of Allah, we were in a house and our numbers and wealth were great, then we moved to another house where

our numbers and wealth decreased." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Leave it, it is bad." This hadeeth was classed as hasan by al-Albani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

The scholars differed concerning these ahaadeeth and how to reconcile them with the ahaadeeth that forbid tatayyur. Some of them interpreted them as they appear to be, and said that this is an exception from the ruling on tatayyur, i.e., that tatayyur is forbidden unless a person has a house which he does not want to live in, or a wife whom he does not want to keep company with, or a horse or servant, all of which he should get rid of by selling them, or by divorcing the wife.

Others said that a house may be regarded as a bad omen when it is too small, or there are bad neighbours who cause trouble; a woman may be regarded as a bad omen when she does not produce children, or she has a sharp tongue, or she behaves in a suspicious manner; a horse may be regarded as a bad omen when it is not used in jihad, or it was said, when it is difficult to handle or it is too expensive; and a servant may be regarded as a bad omen when he has a bad attitude or is not trustworthy or reliable.

Sharh al-Nawawi 'ala Muslim.

The correct view is that all types of belief in bad omens are condemned, and that no kinds of women, houses or animals can cause harm or bring benefit except by Allah's leave. Allah is the Creator of both good and evil. A person may be tested with a wife who has a bad attitude, or a house in which there is a lot of problems, in which case it is prescribed for him to rid himself of these things, fleeing from the decree of Allah to the decree of Allah, and so as to avoid falling into pessimism and belief in bad omens which is forbidden.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"Another group said: regarding these three as bad omens only affects those who believe in that. Whoever puts his trust in Allah and does not believe in omens and superstition, that does not affect him. They said: this is indicated by the hadeeth of Anas, 'A bad omen only affects the one who believes in it.' If a person believes in bad omens, Allah may make that the cause of bad things

happening to him, just as He may make trust in Him and making Him alone the focus of one's fear and hope one of the main causes of warding off evil that people may superstitiously expect.

The reason for that is that tiyarah (superstitious belief in omens) implies shirk or associating others with Allah, fearing others besides Him and not putting one’s trust in Him. The superstitious person attracts evil to himself, so the superstition affects him more, because he did not protect himself with belief in Allah alone and trust in Allah. If a person fears something other than Allah, it gains control over him and he is tormented by it; if he loves something else as well as Allah, he will be tormented by it; if he puts his hope in something alongside Allah he will be let down by it. These matters are well known from real life and there is no need to provide further evidence. Everyone inevitably feels superstitious but the strong believer wards off those superstitious feelings by putting his trust in Allah. Whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him and he will have no need of anyone or anything else. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So when you want to recite the Qur’aan, seek refuge with Allah from Shaytaan (Satan), the outcast (the cursed one).

Verily, he has no power over those who believe and put their trust only in their Lord (Allah).

His power is only over those who obey and follow him (Satan), and those who join partners with Him (Allah, i.e. those who are Mushrikoon, i.e., polytheists)”

[al-Nahl 16:98]

Hence Ibn Mas’ood said: “All of us sometimes feel superstitious, but Allah causes it to disappear when we put our trust in Him.” They said: superstition with regard to houses, women and horses may affect only those who believe in it; as for the one who puts his trust in Allah and fears Him alone, and does not believe in bad omens, then horses, women and houses cannot be bad omens for him.

Then he said:

Whoever believes that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

attributed a superstitious effect to anything in the sense that it may have an effect in and of itself independently of Allah is telling a serious lie against Allah and His Messenger and has gone far astray. His speaking of bad omens existing in these three things does not constitute proof of what he had denied before. All it means is that Allah may a superstitious effect in objects for those who come near them or live in them, and there may be some blessing in some objects, and anyone who comes nears them is not affected by bad omens or anything bad. This is like when Allah gives parents a blessed child and they experience goodness because of him, whilst He gives others a mean child and they experience bad things because of him. This applies to what may Allah may bestow on His slave of houses, wives and horses. Allah is the Creator of good and evil, good luck and bad luck. So some of these things may be “lucky” and blessed and bring happiness for those who come into contact with them, so they are blessed; and some of them may be “unlucky” and bring “bad luck” to those who come into contact with them, all by the will and decree of Allah, just as He has created all other causes and effects which may vary. So He has created musk and other fragrant substances, which give delight to all those who come into contact with them, and He has created their opposites which cause disgust to all those who come into contact with them. The difference between the two types is known from experience. The same applies to houses, women and horses. This is one thing, and the shirki belief in bad omens is something else altogether.

He said concerning the Prophet’s command to that family to leave that house, as mentioned in the hadeeth quoted above:

This is not the kind of superstition that is forbidden. Rather he told them to leave it when they started to think along these lines, in order to achieve two aims and two benefits:

1 – It was so that they would leave a place that they disliked and felt scared in because of what had happened to them there, so that they might find relief from the panic, grief and depression that assailed them there, because Allah has made it man’s nature to hate that which causes him harm even though it is not the fault of that thing, and to love that which brings him happiness, even though the thing itself does not intend to do good. So he commanded them to leave that which they disliked, because Allah sent him as a mercy, and did not send him as a torment. He

sent him to make things easy, not to make things hard. So how could he have told them to stay in a place where they were unhappy and felt scared to stay because of the great losses they had suffered there, when that would serve no purpose of worship or increase their piety or guidance, especially when they had stayed there for so long after they had begun to feel uncomfortable there which made them superstitious. So this protected them from two serious things:

1 – Committing shirk

2 – Protecting them from something bad happening to them because of their superstition, which usually affects those who believe in it. So he protected them because of his great mercy and kindness from these two disliked things, by telling them to leave that house and move to another without any harm coming to them with regard to either their worldly or religious interests.

Miftaah Daar al-Sa’aadah, 2/258

And Allah knows best.