155577 - He has three wives and his family need him to be present among them, but he is intending to observe i‘tikaaf for the entire month of Ramadan!

the question

My question is about i‘tikaaf. My husband is intending to observe i‘tikaaf for the entire month of Ramadan, but we need him because he has three wives, one of whom is in the ninth month of pregnancy and does not live in the same area as him, and he has a number of children. We do not want him to go from the beginning of the month. Does he have the right to go without our consent when we need him to be with us?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

i‘tikaaf is an important act of worship in which a person cut himself off from worldly distractions in order to check himself and worship his Lord. Whatever he could not do before that, he is freeing up his time to do now, and whatever he was falling short in before that, he will now be able to give it the time it deserves. There is no difference of opinion among the scholars concerning the fact that it is Sunnah. In al-Fath al-Baari (4/272), al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar quoted Imam Ahmad as saying: “I do not know of anyone among the scholars who differed concerning the fact that it is Sunnah.” But this act of worship is not permissible if it will lead to falling short in a shar‘i obligation such as looking after one’s family, taking care of one’s sick wife, and looking after one’s father and mother, if a person is the only one who can take care of that and there is no one else who can take his place. Although it is possible for some of his brothers and sisters to look after his parents, there is no one else who can take care of his children or his wives except him.

Therefore, based on what is mentioned in the question, we do not think that it is permissible for the husband to observe i‘tikaaf for the entire month, or even for less than a month, because as a

result of that he will neglect his duties as prescribed in Islam and as enjoined by his Lord, may He be exalted, upon him.

We think that it may be possible to combine the two matters, by taking care of his family and meeting their needs, then going into i'tikaaf for a few days, then he can go back to his home and do what Allah has enjoined upon him, then go back into i'tikaaf again. In this manner he will avoid going against Islamic teachings and no one will be able to blame him in any way.

Shaykh 'Abdullah ibn Jibreen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the maximum and minimum length of i'tikaaf?

He replied:

There is no maximum limit, but it is disliked (makrooh) to make it lengthy if that will lead to the person neglecting his family and being distracted from them. It is narrated in the hadeeth: "It is sufficient sin for a man to neglect those for whom he is responsible." The one who makes it very lengthy will inevitably be neglecting the pursuit of his livelihood and will be burdening others with the responsibility of spending on him, and will cause them hardship because they will have to bring him his food and drink in the mosque, and so on.

Hiwaar fi al-I'tikaaf, question no. 2

He (may Allah have mercy on him) was also asked:

If a person wants to do i'tikaaf but he is in charge of his house and there is no one else, then which is better: to take care of the members of his family or to do i'tikaaf in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadan?

He replied:

We prefer that he should undertake his duty towards his family, meet their needs and stay with them as a mahram and companion, and to protect them, take care of their household, and earn a living with which to provide for them. If he goes into i'tikaaf and leaves them without any

guardian, they will be exposed to the dangers of thieves and evildoers, or not having their needs met, or having to go to the trouble of bringing their own goods from the market, or burdening others with having to buy what they need, which may lead to reminders of their favours that cannot be tolerated. Muslim narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “It is sufficient sin for a man to neglect those for whom he is responsible (for their provision).”

That also includes not spending on them and neglecting them by not earning a livelihood when one is able to do so. If there is someone and his relatives can look after their needs and protect them and bring them what they need, then it is permissible to do i‘tikaaf and in fact it is mustahabb, because there is nothing to distract one from it.

Hiwaar fi al-I‘tikaaf, question no. 11

You can see the entire essay (in Arabic) via the following link

We have previously pointed out the error made by some people who are distracted from looking after their families and taking care of their affairs on the grounds of focusing on da‘wah or teaching. That is not a valid excuse for them to neglect that which was made obligatory upon them. For more information, please see the answers to questions no. 3043, 6913, and 23481 .

And Allah knows best.