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Female Education?

The difference between the Biblical and the Qur'anic conceptions of women is not limited to the newly born female, it extends far beyond that. Let us compare their attitudes towards a female trying to learn her religion. The heart of Judaism is the Torah, the law. However, according to the Talmud, "women are exempt from the study of the Torah."

Some Jewish Rabbis firmly declared, "Let the words of Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women" and "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as though he taught her obscenity"¹

The attitude of St. Paul in the New Testament is not brighter:

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)

How can a woman learn if she is not allowed to speak? How can a woman grow intellectually if she is obliged to be in a state of full submission? How can she broaden her horizons if her one and only source of information is her husband at home?

Now, to be fair, we should ask: is the Qur'anic position any different? One short story narrated in the Qur'an sums its position up concisely. Khawlah was a Muslim woman whose husband Aws pronounced this statement at a moment of anger: "You are to me as the back of my mother." This was held by pagan Arabs to be a statement of divorce which freed the husband from any conjugal responsibility but did not leave the wife free to leave the husband's home or to marry another man.

Having heard these words from her husband, Khawlah was in a miserable situation. She went straight to the Prophet of Islam (S) to plead her case.

The Prophet (S) was of the opinion that she should be patient since there seemed to be no way out. Khawlah kept arguing with the Prophet (S) in an attempt to save her suspended marriage. Shortly, the

Qur'an intervened; Khawla's plea was accepted. The divine verdict abolished this iniquitous custom.

One full chapter (Chapter 58) of the Qur'an whose title is "Almujadilah" or "The woman who is arguing" was named after this incident:

"Allah has heard and accepted the statement of the woman who pleads with you (the Prophet) concerning her husband and carries her complaint to Allah, and Allah hears the arguments between both of you for Allah hears and sees all things...." (58: 1).

A woman in the Qur'anic conception has the right to argue even with the Prophet of Islam (S) himself. No one has the right to instruct her to be silent. She is under no obligation to consider her husband the one and only reference in matters of law and religion.

1. Denise L. Carmody, "Judaism", in Arvind Sharma ed., op. cit., p. 197.

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