

Quran Appreciation - Fall Term (Sep - Dec 2017)

The Story of Lady Hannah and Lady Maryam (a)

Male and Female Roles and Responsibilities

Verse for the session

فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَكُن لِّي الْيُسْرَىٰ
الذَّكَرُ كَأَلْأُنْثَىٰ

So when she gave birth she said: My Lord! Surely I have given birth to a female-- and Allah knew best what she has given birth to -- and the male is not like the female,
(Sura Aale Imran, verse 36)

Reflections

- how did Lady Hannah feel when she delivered the baby?
- how are the male and female different? How are they similar?

Cross reference verses

- 1) Allah grants males and/or females to whoever He wishes - 42:49
- 2) Equality of the male and female soul - 3:195, 4:124, 33:35, 49:13
- 3) Accepting God's decree - 2:216

Tafsir

When Lady Hannah delivered her baby and realized it was a girl, she talks to Allah. She tells Him she has given birth to a female. This was in connection with her vow to dedicate the baby to the temple. Now that the baby was a girl that would be difficult. Usually it was boys who served at the temple. It was also not what she had been expecting. According to some traditions her husband had seen a dream in which he was told there would be a Prophet born from his household. Both Lady Hannah and her husband had thought the baby would be that Prophet.

Allah says He knows better what she had give birth to, for it is He who gives male and female children to His creatures. This was part of the plan of Allah. He knows best and is Wise in His actions. This baby girl would become a blessed and virtuous woman and from her would be born the male child who would become a Prophet. This was better for Lady Hannah than what she had expected.

Sometimes in life we plan something and are intent on carrying it out. When things turn out differently we are disappointed. Some people become resentful. A believer always accepts God's decree and is pleased with it. He knows that it is for the best. *Ridha* is the Arabic term used for this quality. According to Hadith of Imam Sadiq (a), *Happiness and comfort lie in Ridha (being pleased with God's decree) and Yaqeen (conviction) while worry and grief lie in doubt and anger at Allah's decree.* Submission is to trust that God knows all things and has a master plan for our affairs.

Then the verse says 'the male is not like the female'. Some commentators believe these are the words of Lady Hannah, while others say it is the words of Allah. According to Tafsir al Mizan, these are the words of Allah. Males and females are different and each has different roles and responsibilities. They are equal but not identical. There is a difference between equality and sameness.

In God's eyes both are the same. He created them from a single soul and brought them into this world to test them and make them grow towards perfection. He gave them duties and both are responsible for fulfilling those duties. But He made them play different roles in the world and equipped them with their qualities accordingly.

Male and Female similarities

- Both are souls who are born pure and brought into the world to be tested
- Both are creatures of God and have the duty to submit
- Both have the duty to follow God's laws and are accountable to God
- Many duties are similar, the religious and moral duties in the world

Male and Female differences

- Each has been given different roles to play in the family and society.
- Men are responsible for financial support of the women. Women can choose to do that if they wish.
- Some rules for each differ because of their different physical makeup and the role they play.

Importance of women in the Islamic tradition

- The Holy Prophet's progeny continued through his daughter
- respected position of women like Lady Zainab, Lady Ma'suma of Qum, mothers of the Imams, women scholars in Iran,, etc.

- special status of the mother (check: <https://www.al-islam.org/status-mothers-islam-sayyid-muhammad-sohofi/status-mothers-islam>)
- raising the status of daughters and wives from the position they had in the Age of Ignorance

Important Lessons

- 1) The plan of Allah for you may be different from your plan for yourself but it is always the best.
- 2) The male and female are not the same. But that does not mean that one is superior over the other. Only *Taqwa* (God consciousness) can make one superior over the other.
- 3) Both men and women have a role to play in life. They should be concerned about their role well.

Ideas

- 1) Discuss verses that show equality of the male and female soul. Make posters for the verses.
- 2) Students can do an activity on the birth of Lady Maryam. Write or draw the story of the birth. It could be a comic strip, an illustrated story book, a stamp to commemorate the occasion, a card . . . etc.

Further Readings:

<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/458/viewall/concept-of-gender-equality-in-islam/>