

Chapter V

SEX

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If the unit of humanity is a pair of a male and a female then sex is the force that attracts them to one another and brings about their union. The yearning of the one half to its other half in pursuit of completeness is a legitimate basic drive and although it is an end in itself, it is also a means to another end which is the preservation of the species by the process of procreation. In Islam there is no notion of a sinful or dirty nature about the sexual drive, and the concept of self purification by celibacy is against both nature and Islamic guidance. Towards both ends, God has decreed the family institution as the only legitimate venue. The pairing off of a man and a woman to become husband and wife acquires a sanctity that Islam goes all the way to preserve and protect. The bond has to be legitimized by a special contract, the marriage contract; or the wed-lock as referred to in christian vocabulary. Upon the marriage contract moral and legal mutual rights and responsibilities are established, and under its protective umbrella the children are born, with established legitimacy and legal safeguards.

Celibacy

Celibacy was introduced into Christianity with the good intention of self discipline and rising above the calls of the flesh. Islam deals with natural instincts by controlling them but not by their denial. Because it is against nature, history tells us of the betrayal of celibacy by some monks and nuns in earlier times, leading to illicit sexual relations or sexual perversion. In a general theme of praise to christians, the Quran refers to the matter of celibacy stating that it was not decreed by God:

“Then in their wake (referring to Abraham and Noah) we followed them up with (others of) Our apostles; We sent after them Jesus the

son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy: but the celibacy (and monasticism) which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them. (We commanded) only the seeking for the good pleasure of God. And they did not regard it as they should have done.” (57:27)

Indeed modern times are witnessing a number of celibate clergy in the United States of America giving away celibacy and getting married, in the face of the objecting Church. At the time of prophet Mohammad peace be upon him, three muslim men enquired about the worship of the prophet. Finding that it was not as much as they had expected, they said: and who are we in comparison with the prophet who was blessed with God's forgiveness of all his trespasses. One of them decided to stay up all night in prayer, the second to make fasting everyday for good, and the third to remain celibate and never to marry. When he knew about them the prophet rebuked them saying:

“I am indeed the most fearful of God and mindful of Him, but I do not fast continuously, I pray (part of the night) and sleep, and I am married.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

On another occasion the prophet said:

“God has replaced to us the celibacy of the christians with this truthful religion.” (Tabarani)

This relation between man and woman is considered by God as one of His signs and blessings:

“Amongst His signs is that He created consorts for you from amongst you, so that you may find tranquility with them, and (He) set love and compassion between you. Verily in this are signs for people who reflect...” (30:21)

Chastity

Chastity, on the other hand is mandatory in Islam. It is also so in Christianity and Judaism. . . but—it is regrettable to say that—the word has almost been deleted from the code of personal behaviour in the great majority of western societies. Sex outside legitimacy is prohibited, for both men and women whether married or unmarried.

The most famous personal example of chastity in the Quran is Virgin Mary (Miriam) mother of Jesus:

“And remember her, who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her of Our spirit and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.”
(21:91)

“She screened herself away from them (her people) then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: I seek refuge from you to God. Most Gracious (come not near) if you do fear God. He said I am only a messenger from your Lord (to announce) to you the gift of a holy son—She said: How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me and I am not unchaste?”
(19:17-20)

Extramarital sex is forbidden and the Quran says:

“Nor come near to adultery . . . for it is a shameful deed and an evil road (to other evils).”
(17:32)

“Those who invoke not with God any other god, nor slay such life as God has made sacred except for just cause, nor commit fornication: and any that does this (not only) meets punishment, but the penalty on the Day of Judgement will be doubled to him, and he will dwell therein in ignominy. Unless he repents, believes and works righteous deeds, for God will change the evil of such persons into good, and God is Oft-Forgiving Most-Merciful.”
(25:68-70)

The injunctions and forbiddings in Islam apply equally to men and women. The legal punishment for adultery is equal for men and women. Social hypocrisy in many societies over history had lead to a double standard when considering sin committed by men versus sin committed by women. Society tended to be more lenient and permissive towards men . . . forgiving men for sins not forgiveable when women do them. At the root of the contemporary wave of free sex for both sexes was apparently to establish equality and remove discrimination between man and woman. Instead of calling for equal cleanliness the call was for equal dirt. Not so in Islam. . . and in a list of commendable deeds the Quran says:

“For muslim men and women,
for believing men and women . . .
for men and women who are patient and constant.

for men and women who give in charity,
 for men and women who observe fasting,
FOR MEN AND WOMEN WHO GUARD THEIR CHASTITY,
 and for men and women who engage much in God's praise...
 for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward." (33:35)

Because the sex desire is usually attained before a man is financially capable of marriage, the love to God and mindfulness of Him should be sufficient motive for chastity:

"Let those who find not the wherewithal for marriage keep themselves chaste, until God gives them means out of His grace." (24:33)
 The prophet's prescription to the youth was:

"Those of you who own the means should marry... for this should keep their eyes uncraving and their chastity secure. Those who don't, may practise fasting for it curbs desire." (Ibn Massoud)

Chastity is an attitude and a way of life. In Islam it is both a personal and a social value. A muslim society should not condone relations entailing or conducive to sexual license. Social patterns and practices bent on flaring up the sexual desire are frowned upon by Islam... be the means permissive ideologies, pruritic art or neglect of moral upbringing. Personal freedoms should never be taught as the freedom to challenge God's injunctions or trespass over the limits He drew.

Virginity

Whereas chastity is a multifaceted code of inner feeling and outward behaviour, virginity is an anatomical landmark signifying the integrity of the hymenal ring. Because this ring is usually torn as the male organ is introduced into the vagina for the first time (this tear being referred to as defloration), an intact hymen is expected to be the finding in females who have not had sexual intercourse, excluding of course the rare incidents of accidental traumatization of the hymen. Although *virgo intacta* (intact hymen) is not synonymous with chastity (which is a more comprehensive moral feature and not an isolated structural finding), it is usually an accompaniment thereof.

In the earliest days of the current libertarian social norms, more than

a century ago, the masses were indoctrinated with the teaching that the hymen could be torn by horse riding, bicycle riding or engagement in sports and gymnastics. The statement is false but because it was widely spread it became a (false) truth. More and more hymens lost their integrity but this caused no embarrassment as there was a respectable excuse. The new morality has now become so established that in some societies the embarrassment is felt by the girl with an intact hymen: and I am referring of course to the (civilized) west. Many western colleagues show great surprise when told that in communities where religion is still recognized, muslim and christian girls do not indulge in premarital sex, and the virginity at marriage remains in the region of one hundred percent, irrespective of age, education or social class.

The regard given virginity in muslim societies has an influence on the practice of gynaecology. Gynaecologists examining unmarried girls avoid vaginal examination whenever possible and usually resort to pelvic examination per rectum. Menstrual tampons are not used by the unmarried and only pads are used. Accidental injury of the hymen resulting from a fall on a sharp object are taken seriously and treated carefully. Cases of cryptomenorrhoea due to imperforate hymen (a hymen without an opening leading to pent up of menstrual blood inside the vagina) undergoing surgical treatment, do not have the hymen excised but only a small cruciate incision is made in the hymen and the ensuing corners are stitched to the outer face of the hymen. The operation aims at creating a small hymenal opening so that at marriage, when sex is consummated, there will be a fresh tear associated with defloration bleeding as befits a virgin. On occasion the gynaecologist may have to give counsel in cases where the intact hyman is too elastic and therefore stretches out without being torn at consummation of marriage and therefore the expected defloration bleed does not occur. Sometimes also the gynaecologist is consulted by court in cases where a woman applies for divorce on the premises that the husband is impotent and marriage remains unconsummated as evidenced by an intact hymen.

Sexual Ethics

Sex is the ultimate expression of love . . . and is a total physical and emotional encounter. In a brief but beautiful expression the Quran refers to this relation between husbands and wives saying:

“They are your garments and you are their garments.” (2:187)

The sexual union between husband and wife is more than seeking a relief from the urge of desire. Indeed the prophet taught that it is one of the charities in Islam. He said to his companions, enumerating examples of charitable deeds:

“And when the one of you makes love (has sex) it is a rewardable charity.”

His companions were surprised and asked him “How come the one of us answers the urge of his desire and out of this gets the reward of a charity. To which the prophet answered:

“Don’t you see that if he does the same but in a forbidden situation it would be counted against him as a sin? And so if he does it in legitimacy it is counted for him as a charity.” (Muslim)

The sexual relation is a very special relation between consorts, and should be accorded the privacy it deserves. It is not befitting that either of them divulges this aspect of their life to any one. The prophet peace be upon him emphasizes this ethic in the strongest terms. He said:

“Amongst the lowest grades of people before God on the day of judgement, is the man going to his wife (and making sex) and she going to him: then either of them divulging their common secret.”
(Abu Said)

Addressing a gathering of men and women the prophet looked to the men and said:

“Would it be that the one of you locks his door and draws his curtains and seeks his need (sex) from his consort: and later when he goes out he talks to his friends about it?” He then turned to the women and said “Would it be that the one of you locks her door and draws her curtains and seeks her need from her consort: and later when she goes out she talks to her women friends about it?” There was an air of admitting silence. . . and a woman said “It happens. . . apostle of God.” The prophet said: “Never do that. Or it would be like a male devil who encountered a female devil and copulated with her out in the middle of the road and then left her and went away.” (Abu Said)

In order to maintain the bliss and pleasantness of the relation, both husband and wife should acquire the hygienic and esthetic habits that keep them

attractive to one another. It does not behove the woman only to beautify herself for her husband, but this is a reciprocal right. The prophet is reported to have rebuked a man who looked shabby and neglected to tidy his hair and clothing, stating that it was his wife's right that he looks at his best to her, as she to him. Ibn Abbas, a notable scholar of the first Islamic century, stated: "Most certainly I am keen on making myself handsome to my wife, just as I like her to beautify herself for me . . . in keeping with God's saying in the Quran that: 'Women have rights even as they have obligations in an equitable way.'" (2:228)

It is not only a woman's duty, but indeed also her privilege to look at her best in her husband's sight. Husbands away on a journey should announce their coming back rather than taking their wives by surprise, so that the wife has time to beautify herself before meeting her husband. Whenever the prophet's caravan arrived back at Madina, they would camp in the suburbs, send a messenger to announce their arrival, and go to their homes after suitable notice. One of his traditions says:

"If you are in a journey do not enter your home all of a sudden . . . so that the tuggy haired would comb and the unprepared get ready."
(The five except Nissa'i)

In modern times sexology has become a science by itself, and modern western societies almost congratulate themselves for at last recognizing woman's right to attain sexual satiety out of sexual intercourse. The 'right to orgasm' is amongst the latest in the inventory of rights claimed by the "Women's Lib." and other feminist movements. Fourteen centuries ago, Islam recognized that right, as evidenced by the saying of the prophet:

"If any of you has sex with his wife let he be true to her. If he attains his pleasure before her then he shouldn't hurry her away until she also attains her pleasure."
(Anas)

Standard writings in sexology over the past few decades have described the physiological human sexual response and classified it into the four phases of excitation, plateau, orgasm and resolution. Ideally these phases should coincide in both partners, otherwise there will be sexual dysharmony, often due to the man getting his orgasm while the woman is still eagerly awaiting, with inflamed desire, to also achieve her orgasm. As orgasm is followed by resolution where the male organ gets flacid and the man enters into a refractory period after his sexual desire has been satiated through orgasm, the conclusion of the act at that stage would be unfair to the woman hav-

ing been aroused but not satisfied, and that is what the prophet warns against. The man should not just turn his back and go away or go to sleep, leaving his wife frustrated. The coital exercise should proceed until she is satisfied. An effective method of correcting this form of dysharmony is to spend time enjoying their intimacy and helping themselves to one another's bodies in totality, before moving on to genital intercourse. The pleasures of sex spread themselves over a much wider area than the genital region, as manifest in kissing, embracing and caressing the body especially over the erogenous zones of the female physique. This indeed is the normal and commendable approach to sex. It adds to the mechanistic element of sex, the emotional dimension of tender love and mutual affection beautifully portrayed in the Quran as: "They are your garments, and they are yours." It also ensures that by the time the couple move on to genital introduction, the woman would have been aroused over a sufficient period of time and become so excited that she is already quite near her orgasm. In modern medical jargon this prelude is called the "foreplay"...but again long before it was dreamt in the rest of the world of such women's rights, the prophet of Islam gave the same guidance, politely referring to foreplay as the "messenger", in his saying:

"Let-not the one of you fall upon his wife like a beast (camel) falls. It is more appropriate to set a messenger afore the act"

Amongst good sexual ethics also is that the couple should be sensitive to each others needs and limitations, and ups and downs. Even a virtuous excuse like deep involvement in worship is not accepted if the man forgets or ignores his wife's rights. In such a case it is the woman's right to protest. History reports the woman who went to Umar ibn al Khattab (second caliph) consulting him: My husband fasts by day and prays all night...and I feel embarrassed to complain seeing that he spends his time worshipping God. The man was summoned for a hearing. The final verdict was to have three nights for his own worship and to heed the needs of his wife during the rest of the week. Umar also asked his daughter Hafsa how long a woman should stand being away from her husband, upon which he decreed that fighting troops should be given leave to come back home every six months.

Similarly a woman should be responsive to her husband's call. Seeing that men are more prone to sexual arousal by a variety of visual stimuli as they move about all day, the prophet's advice was that the wife should always answer her husband's call:

“The right of the husband is that when he calls his wife to sex she should not deny him herself.”
(Tialissi)

The prophet also advised that whenever a man sees something that arouses his sexual desire, he should go and have sex with his wife.

Sex Technique

Any manoeuvre or position that adds to the pleasure of the sexual encounter between husband and wife is permissible and commendable. One exception is anal intercourse, which is forbidden in Islam. A man may get to his wife from her behind, provided the male organ is introduced in the vagina and not in the anus. This was clearly indicated by the Quran and the Sunna—The Quran says:

“Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when and how you will . . .”
(2:223)

The simile on this verse makes intercourse similar to agriculture, entailing putting the seed into the soil in the hope of getting the fruit; and this does not apply to anal sex.

Several prophetic traditions forbid the practice of anal sex:

“Do not visit women into their back passages”
(Ahmad, Termizi, Ibn Magah)

When the jews of Madina argued with some muslims and said that vaginal coitus approached from behind would cause the baby to have squint in his eyes, the prophet denied this and said:

“From behind or from the front as long as it is in the vagina.”
(Muslim and Abu Dawood)

“Cursed he . . . who has sex with a woman through her back passage.”
(Ahmad)

It is reported that the occasion when the verse of the Quran “Your wives are a tilth unto you, so approach your tilth how and when you will”, was when Umar ibn al Khattab (prophet’s companion and later second caliph) had (vaginal) sex with his wife approaching her from behind and was worried lest it be unlawful. He went to the prophet looking distressed, and asked why he was worried, he used the modest and shy expression: “Apostle of God . . . I changed my saddle last night”. He was relieved

when the Quran and the prophet announced the permissibility of the practice. Another Quranic reference to this matter came with the injunction that intercourse is to be avoided while the woman is menstruating:

“They ask you concerning menstruation. Say it is a hurt and a pollution. So keep away from women during their periods and do not approach them until they become clean. But when they have purified themselves you may approach them in any manner, time or place OR-DAINED FOR YOU BY GOD.” (2:222)

In Islamic law, anal intercourse—even with the wife—is illegitimate. If legally proven, it is punishable according to the discretion of the judge. It stands as legal justification for the wife to apply for divorce if the husband is unwilling to desist.

Over the past two decades the subject of anal sex started to make its appearance in scientific medical meetings that I attended, and one couldn't miss the special furvor some medical people went into, in order to prove that it was completely harmless. Clinical series and overwhelming statistics were presented which contradicted basic knowlege, and on one occasion the researcher even proved that anal sex was safer than vaginal sex. The discussions were all within the context of homosexuality, and the proponents were all the time the same who advocated free sex, free abortion and freedom from religious “relics and taboos”. Since then, I lost my trusting nature and my faith in the integrity of some researchers and at the beginning this was an agonizing feeling. As time passed, one became even more disillusioned. Until 1970 homosexuality was considered to be a disease necessitating treatment. But when the American Psychiatric Association declared that it was not a disease, homosexuality became a wave, a cult and a growing power...until the dream became shattered with the emergence of AIDS (aquired immune deficiency syndrome) that threatens to be the scourge of our century.

Rape

Rape is a grave sin and a major legal crime on the part of the assailant, and if legally proven it may be punishable by death. The assaulted woman, however, would not be considered a sinner, since she was overwhelmed and could not be blamed for it. The Quranic rule applies:

“If one is forced, without wilful disobedience nor transgressing due

limits, then he is guiltless, For God is Oft-Forgiving Most-Merciful." (2:173)

In gynaecological practice the medicolegal implications of alleged rape are obvious and clinical and laboratory data should be sought with diligence. To avoid the tragedy of rape being further confounded by a possible pregnancy, a contraceptive hormone dose is usually given and if not too late it will prevent an undesired pregnancy that could not be disposed of once materialised. The incidence of the crime of rape in a society cannot be isolated from the general moral climate. . . it usually goes with license, drugs and alcohol, the impact of the media, pruritic television and cinema and even seductive women's fashion.

Circumcision Of The Female

This topic may be out of place in a book on Islamic aspects, for the practice is neither Islamic nor ordained by Islam. There is however erroneous confusion in many circles that ascribe it to Islam. The procedure long antedates Islam, and its geographical distribution is different from the map of Islamic peoples. For thousands of years it was prevalent in the Nile valley viz Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as in limited communities in Arabia, Russia and South America. Its exact origin in history is unknown. The reason is said to be moral, for if the external genitals are reduced this is thought to tame down sexual desire and helps girls not to succumb to their sexual desire. This is of course not so, for sexual appetite is aroused by psychological and hormonal mechanisms.

In its mild form the operation entails a trivial trimming of the margins of the labia minora. The extreme form, infibulation, entails removal of labia minora and clitoris, stitching the raw margin leaving a small opening for egress of urine and menses and ingress of the penis at sex. This extreme form was present especially in the Sudan, and at child birth an anterior episiotomy has to be made.

Typically, the operation is performed during childhood, more often by the old village lay woman than by the doctor. It is nowadays almost gone. . . one more dying habit. Complications were rare, and included haemorrhage, sepsis, urethral injury, implantation dermoid and dyspareunia, apart from the psychological aftermath. After marriage, circumcision might result in undermining sexual pleasure by making the woman less prompt to attain orgasm.

Female circumcision was known within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. . . but none of the three religions specifically ordained or prohibited it. At the time of the prophet there was a tribe who subscribed to circumcision of their girls. The woman who used to perform it for them was called Om Rafiea. Seeing that they strongly clinged to their custom and receiving no divine guidance for its prohibition, the prophet advised Om Atiya :

“Take the minimum Om Atiya and don’t exceed it. . . for it is more pleasurable to the husband and protective of chastity (by satiating the woman’s desire).” (Ibn Maja)

During a long career in gynaecology and obstetrics dealing with patients practically from all muslim countries, we find that the practice of circumcision is confined only to Egypt, the Suadn and Ethiopia. Women from other muslim, Arab and non-Arab, countries are not circumcised. Lately the operation was made illegal and it is indeed very rare in the contemporary child population.

Regarding male circumcision the ruling is different. In Islam male circumcision is a sunna (commendable but not obligatory and no sin or punishment if omitted). Patriarch Abraham ordained it and it remained through his progeny, jews (children of Isaac) and muslims (prophet Mohammad is a descendant of Ismail). The scipping of male circumcision by christians was introduced by Paul but not by Jesus Christ, who was himself circumcised.

Modern medical literature suggests a protective role of male circumcision against penile carcinoma and carcinoma of the cervix of the uterus, but persual of this matter is really beyond the scope of this book.

Worship, Rites and Sex

When is sex not permitted:

A. Menstruation

It has been mentioned that vaginal sexual intercourse is not permitted while the woman is menstruating. Physical intimacy to any other degree is allowed during menstruation. The prophet said in this respect:

“Do everything but intercourse.” (Anas)

Aisha, the prophet’s wife, reported that when the prophet wanted to make love during her period, “he would order her to cover her private parts

with a dress, and he made love excluding vaginal intercourse". (all six reporters)

B. Fasting

Sex is also prohibited in the days of Ramadan while fasting. When fasting was first decreed abstinence included day and night. One day a muslim Arab went to the prophet saying: Apostle of God . . . I am doomed. Asked why? he said I had sex with my wife while fasting. The prophet advised: Do you have means to free a slave? The man said: No! The prophet said: Can you feed sixty needy people? The man said: No. The prophet went into his house and brought a basket full of dates, gave it to the man and said: Give this to the poor. The man said: I can't figure anyone poorer than our household. The prophet smiled and said: Then take it and feed it to your family. (Abu Huraira) After that, it was revealed in the Quran that sex is permissible during the night in Ramadan but not during the period of fasting from dawn to sunset:

"Permitted to you on the night of the fasts is the approach to your wives . . . they are your garments and you are their garments . . . God knows what you used to do secretly among yourselves but He turned to you and forgave you. So now associate with them and seek what God has ordained for you . . ."

(2:187)

Kissing and intimacies like hugging are permitted provided they do not lead up to orgasm. Aisha, the prophet's wife reported: The prophet, peace and prayer be upon him, used to kiss in Ramadan . . . but he had perfect control over his desire (and so avoiding orgasm). Non orgasmic secretions that ensue upon sexual excitation (in men and women) are not incompatible with fasting.

C. The Puerperium

After childbirth or miscarriage sex is postponed until the puerperium is over and the lochial discharge ceases. The maximal period of puerperium is six weeks. The woman then takes her ritual bath and can resume prayer, fasting and marital relations.

D. Hajj and Umra

As long as man or woman are in Ihram (intention at the start of hajj or umra, with special form of dress for men) sex or its physical or verbal prodramata are not permitted. Proposal to marry, as well as the marriage contract (and marriage itself) are not to be done until the rites are concluded and Ihram is over. The prophet said:

“A person in Ihram is not to marry, get married or propose to marry.”
(Muslim)

E. Medical or ethical situations during which sex would be harmful or unwelcome.

The Ritual Bath: (ghusl)

After sexual intercourse a ritual bath is mandatory (for both men and women). The same applies even if intercourse did not lead to orgasm, if the penis of the man has touched the vulva. Orgasmic experiences outside sexual intercourse, including night dreams, are treated on the same footing, by both men and women. It is reported that a lady called Um-Saleem asked the prophet: Does a woman have to take a (ghusl) bath if she experiences a night dream? The prophet answered:

“Yes. If she sees the wetness (of orgasm).” (the two sheiks)

After all these sexual phenomena, the man or woman are described to be “junub” until this ritual bath is taken. It should be remembered that the same bath is due also after the cessation of menstruation and at the conclusion of the puerperium. The bath removes the status of “janabah” and enables the person to resume prayer, fasting and hajj and/or umra again. Of the rituals of Hajj, only “tawaf” necessitates “tuhr” (non-junub) as well as wodou (ablution). The other steps necessitate “tuhr” only.

The same bath, “ghusl” is also performed prior to burial of a dead muslim male or female.

The method of “ghusl” is the same for men and women, the water generously bathing all the body, except that a woman has the option not to undo her braids (or hair-do), provided the water reaches the origins of her hair. A woman asked the prophet peace be upon him: I do my hair into braids, do I have to undo them when I have “janabah”? The prophet answered:

“It is enough to pour on your head a handful of water three times then generously flood water over your body, and you have attained ‘tuhr’.”
(Ahmad; Muslim; Termizi)

Husband and wife may share the same stock of water for their ghusl, and may do their ghusl together and from the same basin or container of water, as Aisha the prophet’s wife, reported to do that with him.

The “ghusl” can do for both tuhr and wodou (ablution).

If water is not available, or its use is contraindicated by illness or other duress (for example extremely cold weather for someone who happens to have no means of warming some water), but the general rule of resorting to “tayammum” (tuh and ablution using dry clean dust symbolically to wipe hands and face) is applied so that worship is not to be missed, until water becomes available. Prayers undertaken through tayammum need not be later repeated.

Sex Education

At the time of the prophet, muslims—men and women—were never too shy to ask the prophet about all affairs, including such private affairs as sexual life, so as to know the teachings and rulings of their religion concerning them. As Aisha, the wife of the prophet testified,

“Blessed are the women of the Ansar (the citizens of Madina). Shyness did not stand in their way seeking knowledge about their religion.”

(All except Termizi)

The way the ladies asked the prophet—directly or through his wives—is a proof that sexual matters were not taboo but were fully acknowledged and respected. “Shyness is part of the faith” as the prophet taught, but he also taught “There is no shyness in matters of religion” . . . even entailing the delicate aspects of sexual life.

It is our firm belief that facts about sex should be taught to children in a way commensurate with their age as they grow up . . . both by the family and the school. We emphasize that this should be done within the total context of Islamic ideology and Islamic teaching, so that the youth—beside getting the correct physiologic knowledge—become fully aware on the sanctity of the sexual relation in Islam and the grave sin of blemishing such sanctity . . . whether under Islamic law, or—far more important—in the sight of God. Provided the Islamic conscience is developed we see no reason to shun sex education (unfortunately the rule in many muslim countries), and we believe it is better to give the correct teaching rather than leave this to chance and to incorrect sources and to the concomitant feeling of guilt by the hush-hush atmosphere in which this is done.

Teaching about sex should also have its presence in the curricula of medical schools. We have done this in our medical school as part of the

gynaecology and obstetrics program. We had no difficulty whatsoever with our religious and rather conservative men and women students, for the subject is given within an Islamic perspective.

Sex is an important area of marital life, and when people are in trouble they have only the doctor to resort to: and unless the doctor has had some basic teaching of sex, he or she will be quite helpless to help out. Sexual problems may manifest as strained family relations, psychosomatic symptoms or infertility. Medical treatment may affect sex such as some antihypertensive or antidepressant drugs. Sexual counsel is often a neglected aspect of managing such varied diseases as coronary thrombosis, diabetes, incipient heart failure etc. The role of lack of sexual education in some cases of infertility is well known. Surgery may influence sex in men and women. A carelessly repaired episiotomy, or colporrhaphy may have a devastating effect on marital happiness. The psychological premath and after-math of the operation of hysterectomy is only too well known. On top of all of this, muslim women patients would wish to know the religious ruling on the multitude of gynaecological and obstetric situations relating to worship, and their reference is their doctor. It is therefore a religious dictate that medical education preparing doctors who will cater for the needs of muslim communities, should equip them with the knowledge necessary to answer this need.