

# SEX & SEXUALITY IN ISLAM



*Mawlānā* FEIZEL CHOTHIA

*“ And among His signs is this, that  
he created for you mates from  
among yourselves, that you may  
dwell in tranquility with them.*

*And He has put Love and Mercy  
between your (hearts). In deed in  
that are signs for those who  
reflect.”*

QUR'AN 30:21

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## INTRODUCTION



All praise is due to Almighty Allah ﷻ. We praise him and seek his help and forgiveness. And we seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from *shaytan*, the Accursed, and from the evil of our own selves and wicked deeds. Whosoever has been guided by Allah ﷻ, there is none to misguide him. And whosoever has been misguided by Allah ﷻ, none can guide him. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah ﷻ, alone, without partner or associate.

And I bear witness that Muhammad ﷺ is His Servant and Messenger. May Allah ﷻ, the Exalted, bestow His peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, upon his good and pure family, as well as upon all the noble Companions رضي الله عنهم and upon those who follow them in righteousness until the Day of Reckoning.

Verily, the most truthful speech is the Book of Allah ﷻ, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad ﷺ; while the worst affairs are heretical novelties, for every novelty is a blameworthy innovation. Every innovation (*in matters of religion*) is misguidance and every misguidance is in the Fire.

This book is an attempt to present to the English speaking public an instructive insight into an aspect of Islam that is seldom explored and little understood, namely its teachings regarding sex and sexuality.

Islam acknowledges the sexual instinct, so much so that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself said: *"From the pleasures of the world, perfume and woman were endeared to me most; and the delight of my eye is prayer."* The sexual instinct is veritably described as the fragrance of life, and is bracketed with prayer which is the best means by which men may approach Allah.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ once said: *"A man is rewarded for the sexual intimacy he enjoys with his wife,"* When some of the surprised listeners asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: *"Is a person rewarded for satisfying his passions?"* The Prophet ﷺ replied: *"Do you not see that if he were to satisfy himself in a prohibited manner he would be committing a sin? So if he satisfies himself in a commendable manner he will be recompensed."*

Conjugal relations have a special significance in human affairs and the benefits which accrue from them are incalculable. Serenity and contentment in the life of the married couple depend, for the most part, upon a mutually

joyous and fulfilling relationship. Love is the main theme adding to the quantum of comforts and happiness between husband and wife. The delights of married life save mankind from mental dispersion and physical dissipation and in this manner the objective of the process of procreation may continue smoothly and pleasantly. The Holy Qur'an says:

*"And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are signs for those who reflect."*

(31:21)

Again the Holy Qur'an says:

*"He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same did He make his mate that he might find comfort with her."*

(7: 189)

Islam does not believe in the absolute suppression of the sensual aspect of human nature. The conception of the saintly life in Islam is not, therefore, the extermination of all carnal impulses, but to harness them and keep them within proper limits. Islam does not make the life of an individual dark and dreary, devoid of all enjoyments of life. Islam encourages healthy enjoyments and one out of these is the satisfaction of the sexual desire. Islam does not associate the idea of sexual pleasure with that of sin and vice. Pleasure gives strength to the moral facet of a man provided one does not transgress the limits of its ethical code.

According to Islam, life is not a wretched prison or a dark grave, nor is it a happy hunting ground where one is absolutely free to 'hunt' whatever one desires. It is life worth living, provided one endeavours to live within proper moral limits. Thus in the ideal life of Islam there is no place for shifting the natural, psychic impulses. Islam's approach to life is not negative "a systematic slaying of all the propensities of life" or self-mortification. Islam exhorts its followers to live life with full zest and vigour. In other religions, piety lies in denying oneself the relish of life, whereas in Islam piety is attained in throwing oneself resolutely and joyfully into the arms of life, but not be overpowered by its carnal temptations. Islam believes that there is nothing superfluous and nothing evil in human impulses. They are creative forces given to man provided they are properly made use of.

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## **The Sexual and the Sacral**

In Islam, sexuality enjoys a privileged status and the right to the pleasures of sex is stated forcefully. Islam states a lyrical view of life.

Indeed from the outset the sensual dimension of sexuality is recognized. To the biological and ethical dimensions of love the Quran adds another that is essentially aesthetic. Love as a ludic, playful activity is also part of Allah's benefits. The Quran declares:

*"Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts."*

We should note the word *zuyyina*: sexual pleasure is apprehended as a pleasant setting, an ornament. The same word is used by the Quran to describe the stars that decorate the sky, horses and jewels. Adornment is not, of course, the essential thing in life and the same verse declares that *"...children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage..."* are all, like women, objects of our 'lusts' and, on the other hand, that these are merely *"...the enjoyment of the present life..."* and that only with Allah, *"...with Him is the fairest resort..."*.

Nevertheless, sexual pleasures are conceived by Islam as constitutive of the earthly conditions of life and, as such, they must be welcomed by Muslims. A *hadith* declares that “...*the world is a possession and the best possession is a virtuous woman....*”

Profound, sincere love and the concupiscence, or sexual desires and lusts, that accompanies it are, therefore, a way of achieving harmony. “...*When a man looks at his wife...*”, said the Prophet, “...*and she looks at him, Allah looks upon them both with mercy. When the husband takes his wife’s hand and she takes his hand, their sins vanish between their fingers. When he cohabits with her, the angels surround them from the earth to the zenith...*” Pleasure and desire have the beauty of mountains.

Indeed, tradition lays it down that *nikah* is “...prescribed...”, it is a duty. Hence that strict conception of the obligation of physical love between spouses. Indeed it is not permitted to one of the two partners to give himself or herself up, without the consent of the other, to surrogate religious practices that might obviate or postpone the working of the flesh.

The delay legally laid down for the fulfillment of one’s marital duties, which is four months, cannot be extended for reasons of mystical chastity. An adage current among the *Qadis* (Islamic Judges) has it that devotion in no way exonerates the rights of the flesh.

It is also forbidden to castrate oneself or to castrate anyone else. Any attack on the sexual faculties is as serious as an attack on life itself. The corpuses of *ahadith* traditionally include a whole chapter “...*Of the blameworthy character of castration and voluntary chastity...*”. Some of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions, finding



the retreats on military campaigns long and difficult to bear, asked the Prophet ﷺ permission to castrate themselves or to drug themselves. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ always refused.

Conversely women must not refuse their husbands. One *hadith* even lays it down that “...*the woman who refuses her body and sleeps elsewhere than in her husband’s bed is accursed by the angels until she returns to it...*”. According to another tradition the Prophet ﷺ cursed the *masawwifah* and *mughallisah* woman. The first is the woman who, when invited by her husband to make love, always replies *sawfa* (not just yet). The second is the woman who falsely claims to be having her period. One day a woman asked the Prophet ﷺ what the rights of the husband consisted of: “*A woman must never refuse him, even on a camel’s back.*” According to another version, “...*a woman must never refuse her husband even on the topmost edge of a burning oven...*”

For the same reason, divorce is not favoured by Islam, which sees it as “...*the lawful thing most hated of Allah...*”. A famous saying of the Prophet ﷺ recommends: “...*Always marry, never divorce. Allah certainly does not love tasters...*”, that is, those who marry simply to ‘taste’ a variety of women. Despite Islam favorable attitude toward sexuality, ‘Don Juanism’ and Islam are not compatible.

According to the same reasoning, getting others to marry is a work of piety. The ethics of marriage are far-reaching. One must help others to get married. Parents must do all they can to assist the marriage of those placed in their charge. The Quran says explicitly:

*“Marry the spouseless among you and your slaves and handmaidens that are righteous; if they are poor, God will enrich them of His bounty.”*

A pious son must watch over the chastity of a father who has been made a widower by helping him to marry again. This duty of the *ta'fif* (sexual purity) is no less important than that of the *kafala* (food pension).

In short, the working of the flesh is a benefit of Allah, whose pleasure must be put at the disposal of all, from puberty to the ripest old age, where every Muslim, like Prophet Ya'qub عليه السلام, hopes to be green and vigorous. Polygamy, the rotation of wives, the obligatory character of the sexual act, from which there is no escape, not even through devotional practices, all this gives a special character to the sexual ethics of Islam.

It might be thought that this corresponds to a physiological need and is related to the demographic increase of mankind in general and of the Islamic community in particular. Certainly, when speaking to his community, the Prophet ﷺ himself was fond of giving clear recommendations along these lines: *"Couple and procreate. I shall derive glory from your number at the Day of Judgment."* It may also be said that Muslim ethics defined in this way correspond to economic and military conditions. Women are a biological capital that must not be allowed to remain unproductive.

But considerations of prestige also come into play. *"The best of this community..."*, declared Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, *"...are those who have the largest number of wives."*

However, one cannot deny the fundamental fulfillment of pleasure as stated in the Quran, tradition (*Hadith*) and *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence). Love in its most carnal form is seen as forming the essence of being. Hence the extraordinary value placed on love. Hence, too, the absolute, total condemnation of celibacy: *"Those who live*

*as celibates are the worst kind; those who die celibate are the lowest of the low.”*

This is understandable since marriage is a recovery of otherness. The profound meaning of the institution of *nikah*, an institution so strong in Islam, lies in the recognition of the harmony of the human couple as an essential ideal of life. The complementarity of the sexes is at once the law of the world, a sign of human perfection, the will of Allah and the renewed miracle of creation. Man alone is an impotent being; woman alone is also an impotent being. Only their meeting, in the canonical framework of *nikah*, is creative, based on the complementarity of the sexes. Only this meeting, provided for by the Providence of Allah, allows pregnancy and the awakening of life.

What we have here is a divine prerogative that enables man to go beyond nature and to achieve a veritable sexual mission, which, Islam teaches, should be carried out in the joy, exaltation and intoxication of creation. This is how we should understand the Prophet's ﷺ words: “*To marry is to perform half of one's religion.*” Love, then, is half of faith. The personality of man finds fulfillment only in the intimacy of the sexes. The unity based on *nikah* is a creative mission, because it is based on a freedom assumed within the framework of life with others. This essential intuition makes *nikah* a sacred mission. Sexual pleasure brings us closer to Allah. Woman is not a mere possession of man, nor an evil in herself, still less an object of pleasure for man. And man, in turn, is not the woman's possession, or even a lesser evil for her or a mere source of pleasure. What counts is the relation of affection that unites them. So, in Islam, love is actually prayer.

*“It has been given to me to love three things in your world: women, perfumes and prayer, but the apple of my eye is prayer.”* This *hadith*, which is one of the Prophet’s ﷺ most famous ones, has been the object of innumerable profound commentaries. Imam Nawawi’s twenty-fifth *hadith* tells us: *“Certain poor companions among those who accompanied the Prophet on his hijrah from Makkah to Madinah sought him out and said to him: ‘What matters is money in respect to the reward promised by Allah in the afterlife! The rich pray just as we pray. They fast just as we fast! But on top of that they are able with their excess of goods to give alms, while we have nothing with which to give alms!’ The Prophet replied to them: ‘You think that Allah has given you nothing to give in alms? But each glorification of Allah is alms! Each exaltation of Allah is alms! Each praise of Allah is alms! Each command to do good is alms! And in each working of the flesh there is alms! ‘ The companions were astonished and asked: ‘How, Messenger of Allah, are we to satisfy our desire and be rewarded for it?’ He replied, ‘Doing it unlawfully certainly deserves punishment! Just as to do it lawfully deserves reward!’ “*

This is understandable. Orgasm is certainly a pleasure. But a shared one. And it is in the pleasure derived from another at the same time as oneself that this work of piety resides, a work analogous to fasting, prayer and chastity.

Unconsummated marriage has no place, then, in Islam. Consummation constitutes an essential condition for the act of *nikah* to have any validity where rights of succession are concerned. To emphasise, unconsummated marriage is strictly prohibited in the case of a triple repudiation. Indeed a woman who has been rejected three times cannot return to her husband until a new marriage has been contracted, consummated and followed by divorce. A woman who calls on a pre-pubertal

*muhallil*, with whom the marriage was merely a formality, is not regarded as having carried out the correct procedure. She must first “...*taste the little honey...*” of her new husband, who in turn must first “...*taste her little honey...*”

Another recommendation is intended to integrate fantasy in the sexual relations between spouses and to revive extinct desire by provoked desire: “*If one of you sees a woman who attracts him, let him run home quickly and make love with his wife. That will appease the ardour he feels in his heart.*” One could not find a better example of the extreme tolerance of Islam with regard to eroticism, which is seen as the fulfillment and extension of sexuality. The Islamic view of sexuality involves assumption, not negation, joyous acceptance, not morose renunciation. This total view of love is based on the mutual possession of the couple by one another. Love is the law of life, of the world of man, and should be accepted as such. Sexuality fulfilled, love realized in joy are a way of thanking Allah for the benefits that he showers upon us. To satisfy desire in joy and thanks is, according to the texts, the best way to follow, the way in any case that Allah recommends to us and which the Prophet ﷺ, through example and words, laid before us. A thousand and one Muslim forms of pleasure are already subjacent in the essential sacred texts of Islam.

If that is possible it is because love in Islam is a love without sin, a love without guilt, in which pleasure and responsibility are coextensive. How can we fail to think of the Christian position, which seems to be the exact reverse? Compare the texts referred to above with the attitudes expressed in the New Testament. Take St Paul saying to the Corinthians: “*It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her*

*own husband.” Or take what he said to the Galatians: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would...Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God...Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. “*

There is something irreducible in these attitudes: a profound hostility towards sexuality, which must be tightly controlled, mortified, if not quite simply denied and which at best is sublimated.

Of course, over the past thirty years we have witnessed wide spread questioning of this attitude within the Christian churches. Not only have Catholic and Protestant teachings been considerably relaxed on the subject, but research into Christianity and Judaism has revived interest in the question in a radical way bringing it considerably closer to the Quranic attitudes.

Christian sexuality is not a purely ludic activity. On the contrary, it is serious, for it is a matter of commitment and responsibility and it is this, far more than a sense of sensual joy, that characterizes it.

Islam remains more comprehensive: Eros (Sexual love) must be defined within the context of human nature as it has been fashioned by Allah. There can be no question of

drowning the sexual in the miracle of creation as if it were merely an epiphenomenon, secondary or concomitant.

Christian sexuality is serious, social and sacramental. Muslim sexuality, which is conceived in terms of the couple, is both serious and ludic, social and individual, sacramental and historical.

That the sexual act should be serious cannot be doubted. Inherent in the human condition it is a way of assuming oneself by becoming aware of one's own corporality. The Quran, as we have seen several times, lays it down that there is a true erotic understanding of the world and of self. The miracle of *zawjiyya*, creation in pairs, is often invoked as a marvellous symbol of divine glory. Through love, man becomes spellbound and at one with the universe and Allah himself. But this is not done in an abstract manner. And it is in the work of the flesh that this self-enrapture is realized. This erotic understanding of the world is not of an intellectual order. It is of the order of desire, for it is realized through the contact of one body with another, which is at once self-consciousness and projection outside self, self-centredness and otherness. Sexuality is an intentionality which follows the general flow of existence and yields to its movements. This observation expresses an essential aspect of the Islamic view of sexuality.

Sexuality is also regarded as self-revelatory. Through this revelation man transcends himself by discovering his own sexuality. Through it man is given ecstasy and proves capable of communicating it. He also becomes aware of his unsuspected power and the depths of his being. Sexuality is an apprenticeship of life in others. There is no valid solitary practice for sexuality. It is a discovery of others, fusion in them. Lastly sexuality is a sacrament. Sexual union rests on a previous divine will, which is

precisely that of the separation of the sexes. The sexual act, therefore, can be realized only in marriage, which is the joyful, unreserved acceptance of a precise type of human relationship and the recognition by society of that agreement between two persons, of which procreation is merely a consequence.

Through sexuality the whole human being is taken seriously. This is why so much attention is paid to sexuality. Sexuality is to be taken seriously because it bears witness to the seriousness of existence. The whole of life, according to Islamic teaching, bathes in an atmosphere of sexuality. Sometimes this is carried to the point of obsession. One should marry. One should have sexual intercourse. Parents must marry off their children and among the duties of filial piety is that of getting a widowed parent to remarry. To make love is an overriding duty, from which there is no excuse, even devotion to Allah. Devotion itself is expressed in terms of the lawful satisfaction of desire. So, in its very practice, sexuality transcends earthly existence: the afterlife is again a sexual existence. Paradise implies orgasm and perpetual eroticism.

Though a serious matter, sexual activity is nevertheless ludic. Sexual games (*mula'abah*) are warmly recommended by the Prophet ﷺ, hence that specific erotological dimension. Love is not to be performed in sadness or gloom. It is not a painful duty. It is the most joyful gift of heaven. It is one of those 'good things' (*tayyibat*) that Allah lavishes on existence. It is pleasure. Indeed it is one of the highest forms of pleasure.

The meaning of paradisiacal pleasure is certainly that it takes the body seriously. Far from derealizing our desires, Islam teaches us to realize them fully. The image of paradise is positive and affirmative of self. Islam does not



repress the libido. In paradise our desires will be accommodated, taken seriously. This means that the peace of paradise is achieved through self-fulfillment. For paradise is first of all a meeting with others. Love is in a sense multiplied by the presence not only of wives, but also of *huris*, maidens of paradise. This pluralization of love implies its own transcendence in others. In paradise everyone will have at least one companion, for “...*there is no celibacy in paradise...*”

Paradise, then, is crowded. Without the *Ahl ul-Jannah*, the ‘people’ of paradise, it would lose all meaning. An empty paradise is inconceivable. Moreover the desire of the believer to meet the *huris* is not a one-way affair, for the *huris*, too, await impatiently the arrival of the blessed to whom they have been promised. Sometimes the *huris* ardently wish to see their earthly masters. They leave their palaces. The archangel *Ridwan* sometimes takes them to the summit of paradise from where they can contemplate their masters.

Man, then, is expected. He is the object of desire, of attention, affection; even while still on earth he is already the object of paradisiacal eros. Transcendence to others is certainly a fundamental element in the happiness of the afterlife. Hence that perpetual, eternal pleasure. Paradise is the time of suspended pleasure. It is also the place of perpetual arousal and orgasm that lasts for forty years. Earthly orgasm gives some foretaste of paradise and it would not be far from the mark to state that life in paradise is an infinite, eternal orgasm.

In fact the very image of paradise activates the consciousness of the believer, who assumes through it the plenitude of his being and projects himself straight into this total vision. The very definition of paradise is that faculty enjoyed by any individual to be able to satisfy his

desire. Paradise is the total and absolute satisfaction of desire.

Of course the erotic is not the ultimate pleasure. It is merely one stage in the reconciliation of man, a stage that comes after harmony with things and which prepares him for the dazzling vision of Allah. The final scene narrated by *Imam* Suyuti describes the summum of life in paradise, which is communion, that is to say, the passage from the meeting with the other in the form of the earthly love to the meeting with others within the community of the Elect in paradise and lastly the meeting of the latter with their Supreme Creator.

Of course the sexual act normally culminates in procreation and rests on a realistic view of life. But it is permitted to depart from reality. The work of the flesh then becomes a free activity performed in joy and abandon. As a result all the contraceptive practices, whether coitus interruptus or the myriad other forms, are tolerated.

Sexual pleasure is at once a condition and an end in itself. Separated from its procreative function, as Islam accepts that it may be, sexuality is not deprived of its profound intentionality: its intrinsic content takes on an exemplary value. By becoming an entertainment, sexuality changes direction and import. It departs from its procreative effectiveness only to be invested at once by an exemplary creative effectiveness, since it is an affirmation of spirituality and a witness to freedom.

In other words, the practice of sexuality is a dialectic of the ludic and the serious. That is why it has to be played seriously and why that 'game' has to be taken seriously. Hence the grandeur and vibrance of the Islamic intuition. The Islamic view focuses on the richness of the sexual, to assume it, and to live it intensely.

It is a truism to declare that sexuality is a transcendence of the individual. One function of sexuality resides in its ability to unite individuals to the community. The *hadith* lays it down quite explicitly that sexual life is unifying and that the Islamic *Ummah* rests, in its grandeur and its misfortunes, on the genetic life. The total, social unity of men is a resultant of sexual dynamism. And, conversely, the community of the *Ummah* also imposes its own requirements, its own tendencies on the individual's drives. Love, the universal principle of life, governs human development. Nevertheless love has a double 'entry', individualized and social. Allah's purpose in creating the 'races and tribes' under the rule of diversity was certainly to make possible mutual knowledge (*li ta'arafu*). We have also seen that Allah created of each thing its double (*zawjah*) so that it might cohabit with it (*li yaskuna ilayha*). Indeed, for Islamic tradition, cosmic becoming, organic life, personal development, social stratification and historical processes are closely bound up with one another and taken together are indissociable from Allah's purpose and from the wonders of his creation.

To love is to have intentions towards the beloved! Libidinal relations are mutual and form the basis of being with-others. Moreover sexuality forms the basis, beyond the autonomy of the person of the lover, for the community of the lover and the beloved. It is certainly the awareness of the other that is aimed at through one's body,

The sexual act is made up of the reciprocity of the couple. I become aware of my own body through the reactions of my partner's body and my consciousness is freed in contact with the consciousness of the beloved. The genetic activity is the common act of the lover and the beloved or, to be more precise, there is no longer a lover and beloved, but a loving fusion of bodies and spirits. This

is what the prophet Muhammad ﷺ calls “...*tasting each other’s little honey...*”.

It is in the light of these considerations that the theory of the Muslim view of *nikah* assumes its full meaning - a conception that, beyond the lawful practice of sexual activity, grounds the sexual in the social. *Nikah* bears within itself a sociological definition of the couple that is expressed through statuses, roles and their respective hierarchies. The rejection of sexual anarchy rests on this specific unity that unites the couple not in an abstract, metaphysical unity, but within a real, concretely situated society. *Nikah* situates the individual within the *Ummah*. Hence that contempt for the bachelor. Hence, too, that moral condemnation of the celibate. Through *Nikah* the individual is integrated into the group and the group is integrated into the individual.

One must not forget the whole personal, even personalist dimension of Muslim sexuality, for it is based on the notion of responsibility: sexuality is certainly a ‘deposit’ entrusted to man. Each individual is responsible. Each Muslim man and woman is responsible in the first instance for himself or herself and for his or her body. Hence the importance of the chapters of *fiqh* that lay down the responsibility of each of the two partners.

To accept sexuality is an act of faith. Sexuality is in turn identified with prayer, alms, martyrdom, an act of piety, the renewed miracle of prophecy, a prefiguration of heavenly delights ... This is because it bears witness to a divine purpose. It expresses the will of Allah. To abandon oneself joyfully to it is truly to manifest one’s gratitude to Allah around the continuous, overflowing miracle of the renewal of life. Moreover the Muslim has been created only for love. As the expressive Tunisian song has it: “...*Our community was created for passionate love...*”

*Nikah* is a veritable sacrament. *Nikah* confers on the sexual act a psychological, social, affective and spiritual nobility so splendid that any departure from it is judged accordingly. A Muslim marriage is sacred but it is certainly not eternal or absolute. To ground sexuality in freedom and in the autonomy of the person is necessarily to accept precariousness and relativity; in sexual matters, the will of Allah gives way to the will of man. Man's will is made up of successive choices and approximations, and not irrevocable decisions. Moreover Islam, while disapproving of divorce, that is to say, the breaking of the sacred link of *nikah*, does in the final analysis accept it. Break and change are implied by the very nature of interpersonal relations based on love, a passion whose character is perfectly expressed in the Prophet's short but moving prayer, "*My Allah who thus overturns hearts, strengthen mine...*", signifies the force of love and of its hazards. In the last resort, there are no eternal marriages or absolute vows, and there are renewed choices and hopes, that is to say, a determination to be faithful to oneself and to the beloved. In addition to being a sacrament, sexuality is certainly a personal commitment.

Islam posits sexuality in terms both of sacrament and personal commitment, because it wishes to apprehend it without either reducing it or mutilating it. Whereas Christianity reduces the sexual by sublimating or transcending it, Islam, while also wishing to transcend the sexual, by sublimating it, has always refused to reduce it and still less to destroy it. If sexuality is coextensive with faith, it is also coextensive with man. Hence both that sense of pleasure that springs out of the Quran and that hope that man, in spite of everything, will manage to save himself by accepting himself, that is to say, by loving.



## Islamic Teachings on Sexual intimacy

Islam acknowledges the sexual instinct, so much so that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself said: *“From the pleasures of the world, perfume and woman were endeared to me most; and the delight of my eye is prayer.”* The sexual instinct is veritably described as the fragrance of life, and is bracketed with prayer which is the best means by which men may approach Allah.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ once said: *“A man is rewarded for the sexual intimacy he enjoys with his wife,”* When some of the surprised listeners asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: *“Is a person rewarded for satisfying his passions?”* The Prophet ﷺ replied: *“Do you not see that if he were to satisfy himself in a prohibited manner he would be committing a sin? So if he satisfies himself in a commendable manner he will be recompensed.”*

Conjugal relations have a special significance in human affairs and the benefits which accrue from them are incalculable. Serenity and contentment in the life of the married couple depend, for the most part, upon a mutually joyous and fulfilling relationship. Love is the main theme

adding to the quantum of comforts and happiness between husband and wife. The delights of married life save mankind from mental dispersion and physical dissipation and in this manner the objective of the process of procreation may continue smoothly and pleasantly. The Holy Qur'an says:

*"And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are signs for those who reflect."*  
(31:21)

Again the Holy Qur'an says:

*"He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same did He make his mate that he might find comfort with her."*  
(7: 189)

Islam does not believe in the absolute suppression of the sensual aspect of human nature. The conception of the saintly life in Islam is not, therefore, the extermination of all carnal impulses, but to harness them and keep them within proper limits. Islam does not make the life of an individual dark and dreary, devoid of all enjoyments of life. Islam encourages healthy enjoyments and one out of these is the satisfaction of the sexual desire. Islam does not associate the idea of sexual pleasure with that of sin and vice. Pleasure gives strength to the moral facet of a man provided one does not transgress the limits of its ethical code.

According to Islam, life is not a wretched prison or a dark grave, nor is it a happy hunting ground where one is absolutely free to 'hunt' whatever one desires. It is life worth living, provided one endeavours to live within proper

moral limits. Thus in the ideal life of Islam there is no place for shifting the natural, psychic impulses. Islam's approach to life is not negative "*a systematic slaying of all the propensities of life*" or self-mortification. Islam exhorts its followers to live life with full zest and vigour. In other religions, piety lies in denying oneself the relish of life, whereas in Islam piety is attained in throwing oneself resolutely and joyfully into the arms of life, but not be overpowered by its carnal temptations. Islam believes that there is nothing superfluous and nothing evil in human impulses. They are creative forces given to man provided they are properly made use of.

Islamic education is comprehensive and embraces all fields of human endeavor. It has provided very useful and appropriate sex education to married couples. The sexual instinct in man is a very strong and aggressive one and it is necessary and more than desirable to moderate it in order to strike a balance between the animal and human constitution of man. The history of man shows that the slightest imbalance in this relationship can cause havoc with the cultural and social order. The sexual instinct has oftentimes been exploited through the ages and by so doing has lead to gross obscenity and indecency which ultimately destroyed the very cultures and civilisations in the name of which such shameful acts have been committed.

It is the primary duty of every healthy and pious society to divert this instinct of man from these extremes to a state of moderation and then to regulate it within reasonable, desirable and appropriate limits.

Islam has regulated the relationship of man and woman on the basis of wisdom and natural reality. Its first fundamental and universal truth is stated in Surah Al-Zaariyaat:



*“And of you we created pairs.”*

One of the primary objectives of creation in pairs is the reproduction of their species:

*“He has made for you pairs from among yourselves ... to multiply you”*

Each human being feels a powerful urge towards procreation and is instinctively attracted towards members of the opposite sex. If this urge is not properly controlled and disciplined, it can lead to sexual anarchy and make man a sheer brute animal.

Islam has, therefore, restricted sexual relationship to matrimony. It has advocated marriage and discouraged a life of celibacy. The normal and natural way of life for a Muslim is to get married and raise a family. This is the only course open for a Muslim, to satisfy his natural instincts. Thus, Islam has very successfully satisfied the emotional and sexual aspect of man's natural instinct and at the same time arranged for legitimate procreation through marriage.

**“...Your Wives are a Tillage...”**

*“Your wives are a tillage unto you; so approach your tilth as and when you desire”.*

Very delicate matters relating to the sexual relationship between husband and wife are mentioned in this verse in a comprehensive way without offending any cultural or social customs. Manner, time and place are very significant in sex, and in this verse it is compared to a farmers tillage. It is a serious affair to him; the farmer sows the seed in order to reap the harvest, but he does

not sow out of season nor cultivate in a manner which will injure or exhaust the soil. Every kind of mutual consideration is required, and so too in the matter of sexual intimacy between husband and wife.

The simile of the husband and wife as the farmer and the farm contains encyclopedic knowledge and insight into the nature of the sexual relationship between husband and wife.

### **Etiquettes of the First Night**

Islamically, the ideal situation would be where the husband and wife are strangers to each other, having no personal contact with each other previously due to the strict laws of *hijab* in the *Shari'ah*. Coupled with this feeling of strangeness are the natural constraints of *haya* and modesty, that form an integral part of *Imaan*. Under the particular circumstances it is quite natural that both the husband and wife will be extremely bashful and under considerable strain and anxiety.

By way of introduction and in order to “*break the ice*”, they should firstly greet each other with the traditional Islamic greetings of *salaam*. Thereafter the husband should gently place his right hand on his bride’s forehead and recite:

*“O Allah! I ask of You her goodness, the good within her and the goodness of the disposition upon which she was created. I seek Your protection from her evil, the evil within her and the evil of the disposition upon which she was created.”*

Thereafter, *wudhu* and two *raka'at* of *Salatul-Hajah* may be offered seeking Allah’s guidance in marriage and a blessed life with pious offspring. This *Salah* will also serve as a token of gratitude. Together they should supplicate to

Allah to sanctify the marriage. It is advisable that the newly wed couple remind each other of their Islamic obligations and if needs be they may read some Islamic literature to each other.

Through wisdom and tact, they should become more free and open in the discussion, trying to discover each other's temperament. As sexual inclinations vary with every individual, the bride and the bridegroom will have to display patience with each other. Sexual union on the first night of marriage is not the most important thing between the couple. Their first intimate association gives them an opportunity to know each other more closely, to assess each other's feelings and attitudes.

With some brides, anticipations, expectations or fear of intimate union brings about a reluctance in attempting sexual union. The bridegroom should regard this moment as an opportunity to show his consideration for her tender feelings, to demonstrate that sex is a secondary aspect of marriage and that her health and feelings mean more to him.

One point of great importance that many newly wed, inexperienced men overlook is the importance of extreme gentleness and tenderness on the first night and during the first sexual encounter. Many are under the false notion that gentleness is against 'manliness' and the harm and damage that is done to the relationship on the first night due to this foolish notion negatively impacts on the marriage for months and years to come.

During the initial stages of sexual union a virgin generally undergoes considerable anxiety and pain, which results in fear. During such a time the husband must take great care and consideration in his actions and behaviour towards his bride.

Sometimes, due to bashfulness or other anxieties, the groom may also show reluctance to be sexually intimate. Then it is the bride's turn to display her understanding and patience towards him.

One more point of caution to the husband is never to harbour unnecessary suspicions against the wife if for some reason it 'appears' that she is not a virgin. This is *haraam* and a major sin. It is forbidden to harbour ill-thoughts about the next Muslim merely on the basis of such conjecture, and worse still to make her a target of abuse and oppression on this basis. There are many reasons a girl could lose her virginity that could be substantiated medically such as heavy menstrual flow, illness, falling, jumping, horse-riding, certain sporting activities, ageing, etc.

### **The Intention for Sexual Intercourse**

It is advisable to make the best of intentions before commencing the act of sexual intimacy. For example, *Hazrat Ali* عليه السلام has suggested, as reported in his *Wasaya* (Book of Advices), "*At the time of sexual intercourse, the following intention should be made: 1) Protection against adultery, 2) Protection from the evil gaze at strange women, 3) and Attainment of pious and upright progeny who will serve Islam.*" Another intention could be to please Allah سبحانه by showing love, tenderness and kindness to His creation and to appreciate his favours.

When sexual intimacy is enjoyed with the correct intention, then not only is it an act of physical pleasure, but it also becomes an act of great reward and spiritual advantage.

## Preparation for Intercourse

The psychological preparation for sexual intercourse is equally as important as the act of intercourse itself. Anything that will cause agitation or revulsion should be avoided completely. This will 'turn-off' the opposite partner with detrimental consequences for the couple as well as their marriage.

Amongst the factors that are a major 'turn-off' are dirt, filth, bad odours and uncivilized behaviour. In particular, bad odours from the mouth or body are very unpleasant, including the habit of smoking, which can altogether kill passion and desire. It is of extreme importance that the mouth be clean, especially with smokers, who should take extra precaution in this regard.

Of the beautiful conduct of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is that he used to apply perfumes and cleanse his mouth and teeth with *Miswak* (the tooth brush stick) before sexual intimacy. Even in such minute and apparently insignificant matters, he has shown us the path to bliss and success.

Islam's emphasis on cleanliness is a known fact as is born by the famous *Hadith*, "*Cleanliness is half of Faith*". Physical cleanliness enhances spiritual purity and at the time of sexual intercourse this aspect of Islam becomes even more emphatic. Husband and wife, who are constantly in each others proximity must maintain proper hygiene so as not to cause abhorrence. Such neglect can be detrimental to a marriage. Furthermore, before engaging in sexual intimacy both the partners should preferably be in the state of wudhu.

*Allamah* Ibn al-Jawzi states in his book '*Said ul-Khatir*' that the couple should fix a certain part of the day or night for intercourse in order that both prepare physically and

psychologically. The anticipation will increase and heighten their pleasure. Furthermore, it will eliminate the possibility of any one of them being in an undesirable or unprepared state of mind or body.

Thus, a man should inform his wife of his intentions to have sexual relations well in advance, in the morning if needs be, in order that both be fully prepared at the appointed time. It is for this very reason that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the noble Companions رضي الله عنهم would not enter their homes during the night after returning from a long journey. Rather, they would enter only in the morning. The idea was to give the womenfolk sufficient time to prepare themselves for their husbands. In the words of the Prophet ﷺ, *"In order that the unkempt, dishevelled women comb their hair and the unprepared ones shave (the pubes, underarms, etc.)"*. There can be no greater 'turn-off' to a returning husband than to find his wife in an unkempt, untidy condition. It is therefore necessary that he announce his imminent arrival either by way of letter, telephone or a messenger, in order that his wife prepare herself for his arrival.

Furthermore, the noble Companion, *Hazrat Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه*, said, *"I love to adorn myself for my wives, just as I desire them to adorn themselves for me."* This indicates the importance of hygiene, appropriate grooming and physical appeal in respect of both husband and wife in preparation for the act of intimacy.

## **Foreplay**

Foreplay is a vital element in a happy and successful marital life. It should never be neglected. It is absolutely essential that a man arouse his wife via foreplay before the act of intercourse itself. It is indeed callous and selfish if he fulfils his desires like an animal while his wife is left

suspended as it were. This is extremely demoralising for the woman and brings with it terrible consequences for the couple. Therefore every couple should take the trouble of exploring those regions of each other's anatomy that will arouse their desires and heighten their pleasures. These areas are known as the 'erogenous zones'. They vary from person to person but are generally concentrated in the upper body area and the area below the navel, behind the knees, the lips, etc. These areas, if stroked tenderly, cause the sexual desires to be aroused and passions to be kindled.

Even in this regard we find the beautiful teachings of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ emphasizing, in a very subtle manner, the importance and necessity of foreplay. It is narrated that once *Rasulullah* ﷺ came to know that Jabir رضي الله عنه had married a widow. He ﷺ said to him, *"Why did you not marry a virgin with whom you could indulge playfully and who would playfully indulge with you?"* This is a subtle indication towards loveplay or foreplay between the couple.

The husband must spend sufficient time with her to arouse and prepare her for the act of procreation. He should start with kisses on the lips which are obviously very sensitive and then gradual caresses on the face, ears and various parts of the neck, at the same time passing his hands through the hair. However the degree of sensitivity of these parts varies considerably in different individuals but once the husband knows his partner he can very effectively arouse her by caresses and kisses. One word of caution though: These preliminaries should not become a matter of routine so that the husband always starts from the same point or in the same manner.

It is a well-known fact that a woman usually needs more time to reach fulfillment (climax). If the woman reaches

her climax first, there is no harm, as the man can always follow her, whereas the opposite is disastrous because the man may not be able to bring her to climax and it may lead to many psychological and emotional complications. This, then, would be the first purpose of love play.

The second purpose is that it stimulates the glandular secretions in the woman which lubricate the vulva and the vagina, thus facilitating intromission. In the man, loveplay provokes erection and urethral secretions which also act as a lubricant. Without erection, coition is not possible, and without the aforesaid secretions in both partners there is a definite danger of damaging the female genitalia at the time of penetration.

Furthermore, the importance of expressing love and tender feelings towards each other can be learned from the *Ahadith* of the Prophet ﷺ: “*When a husband or wife gaze at each other with love and affection, Allah ﷻ gazes at them with mercy and kindness. When the husband and wife hold each others’ hands with love and affection, Allah ﷻ forgives their sins.*”

If the wife is breast-feeding, caution should be observed that no milk enters the throat during the course of loveplay. It is *Makruh Tahrimi* (Abominable almost to the point of Impermissible) for the husband to drink the milk of his wife. If any person, out of ignorance has transgressed this regulation of the *Shari’ah*, the only form of expiation is sincere repentance. However, this does not affect the bond of *nikah* as is the misconception of some.

## **Recitation of Du’as**

For protection against *shaytan* and other harms, it is important to recite the *Masnun Du’as* (Prophetic Supplications) at the time of intercourse. In this way both



the couple and their progeny will be protected from any spiritual or physical harm.

They are as follows:

Before commencing the act of Intimacy

*“In the name of Allah. O Allah! Save us from the mischief of the Devil and save the progeny you bestow upon us (from the mischief of the devil).”*

At the time of Ejaculation

*“O Allah! Do not grant shaytan any share of that which you have granted me.”*

Note that at the time of ejaculation, the *du’a* should be recited in the mind only, not verbally and that both husband and wife should recite the *du’a*. It is reported in the *Ahadith* that if a person does not recite these *du’as*, *shaytan* participates with him in the act of coitus.

Neglect in reciting the *du’a* is also a cause for rebellious and disobedient progeny as is observed in our times. *Shah Abdulhaq Mohaddith Dehlawi* has observed in ‘*Ash’atul Lammaat*’ that “...if a prayer like this is not made at the time of coitus and only the sexual urge is satisfied like animals do, the child that may be born as a result of it will not be saved from the evil influence of the devil.” He further states that, “... this is the main reason why the morals of the present generation are not good.”

This is significant in the sense that it shows how Islamic ideals generate Allah consciousness and piety, even in those activities of life which are generally looked down upon by other religions. It is imperative that every couple endeavour to learn, memorise and recite these *du’as* at

the appropriate time. Only the least effort and sacrifice of time is required, but the returns are enormous and far-reaching.

## **Correct Times**

The act of procreation should take place at such a time when there is a natural counter-balance in the temperament of both the partners i.e. not at extreme hunger nor immediately after a heavy meal or when there is a need in answering the call of nature. It is important that cohabitation take place at the correct times in order to ensure good health for the couple as well as their child-to-be.

The act of intercourse should ideally take place when there is a state of relaxation and temperamental balance in both husband and wife. Any form of tension or pressure in the form of hunger, thirst, being bloated, anger, depression, illness, etc. will dampen the pleasure.

Faqih Abul-Laith Samarqandi writes in his book '*Bustan*' that the best time for intercourse is the latter part of the night. This is so because the stomach is full during the early part of the night and intercourse is undesirable on a full stomach. Hazrat Aa'ishah رضي الله عنها reports that, "*It was the noble habit of Rasulullah ﷺ that after completing the Witr Salah at the end of the night, he would consort with his wife if he so desired. If not, he would lay down on the musalla (prayer rug) until Hazrat Bilal رضي الله عنه would call out the azan for the Fajr Salah (Morning Prayers).*"

It should be noted that the suggestion of sexual intercourse in the earlier part of the night is not a ruling of the *Shari'ah*. It is reported that the Prophet ﷺ enjoyed the intimacy of his wives at various times of the day and night.

## Permissible Positions

As far as the positions of sexual intercourse are concerned, Islam has granted general permission. However two positions are hinted at in the Qur'an and *Hadith* which if practised can be very beneficial to the act of procreation.

The first is the common and natural way where by the woman lies on her back and the man on top of her. The first benefit of this position is that the man has more control of movements thus more pleasure is derived. The second benefit is that the wife will have to carry some weight of the husband through which she will also achieve more pleasure. The third benefit is that this position enables the woman to conceive more quickly. By careful study of the Qur'an one may find that this position is hinted at.

*"Then when he (Adam ﷺ) covered her (Hawa ﷺ) she bore a light burden".*

This is when a woman lies on her back and man over her in such a way that his body 'covers' the body of the woman.

The second method is explained in the *Hadith* in the following words:

*"If anyone of you sits between the four parts of a woman...."*

This means a man sitting within the thighs of the woman and this will be possible when the woman lies on her back with her legs lifted up (the legs can be rested on the shoulders of the man) the man thus entering her in a

sitting or squatting position, in which instance her thighs and calves form the 'four portions'. This position also helps conceiving as in this position the penis comes closest to the womb.

Any other posture or position, husband and wife choose, is quite in order. There was a baseless superstition that the Jews of Madina entertained as far as rear entry was concerned. According to them, the child born out of such union would be squint eyed. Some Muslims were misled by this myth of the Jews. Once *Hazrat Umar* ﷺ had intercourse with his wife, approaching her from the rear (not anal entry). Later he was overtaken by the thought that perhaps he had committed an undesirable act. Immediately he rushed off to the Prophet ﷺ calling out: *"I have been destroyed, I have been destroyed..."* He was asked what was the matter, to which he recounted his fear of having committed an undesirable act. *Rasulullah* ﷺ remained silent, giving no answer. Some time later, these verses of the Qur'an were revealed:

*"Your wives are a tillage unto you, thus approach your tillage as and when you wish."*

(2,223)

Thereafter *Rasulullah* ﷺ explained the purport of this verse, namely that intercourse is permissible in any position, from front or rear, so long as anal sex does not take place. The similitude in the Qur'an of women is that of a tillage or farm; which can be approached from any direction, provided the seeds are planted only in the 'farm' and not elsewhere! Similarly any method of approach is permissible so long as his 'seed' is planted in the 'tillage' (ie. vagina) and not the anus. When the above-mentioned verse of the Qur'an was revealed, all such false notions as propagated by the Jews were demolished once and for all.

## Afterplay

Almost as important as foreplay and the actual act of intercourse, is the termination and conclusion of the act of the intimacy or 'afterplay'. Often times it happens that the husband reaches a climax earlier than the wife. In such a case the husband should continue until she reaches her climax and is satisfied. This is absolutely vital and essential. Disengaging before the wife achieves her climax is cruel and selfish and breeds animosity and contempt in the heart of the wife for her husband.

Furthermore, disengaging immediately after sexual union often gives the woman an impression that the man is only concerned with gratifying his lust and is merely 'using' her. This is bound to affect marital harmony. Ali عليه السلام said in this regard, *"Await the completion (climax) of the wife before disengaging, otherwise she will become your enemy."*

## More than Once

Just as essential as cleanliness is before cohabitation, so too is it thereafter. Both husband and wife should preferably wipe and clean their private parts (ie. *istinja*) as this will ensure good health. The Prophet ﷺ taught the Companions to cleanse themselves after cohabitation.

If the couple wish to engage in sexual intercourse more than once it would be most advisable if ablution be made as this will make the conjugal union more pleasing to both. If not, then they should perform *wudhu* or at the very least, as mentioned above, wash their private parts.

## How Often ?

How often should sexual union be performed? This depends upon the natural capacity of each individual and

the willingness of the partner. Mutual understanding in this respect is very important. It must, however, be emphasized that under no circumstances can a wife, or far that matter a husband, refuse to engage sexually with his or her spouse unless there be a medical reason not to do so. Both husband and wife are duty bound to respond to their spouses needs. The Holy Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said, *“When the husband invites his wife to fulfill his need, she must respond even if she is, at that moment, tending to the meals.”*

Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ instructed: *“When the husband invites his wife to his bed and she declines his invitation to join him in bed (without a legitimate Shar’i excuse) and in consequence the husband passes the night in a state of resentment, the Angels curse this woman till dawn.”*

The relationship enjoyed by between husband and wife is unique. They fulfill the most intimate needs of each other, such as no one else can do. As such, there is a greater call for mutual accommodation and if they fail to fulfill the natural desires of each other they would be doing the greatest disservice to themselves.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ acknowledged these needs and issued instructions accordingly. Defiance of these instructions creates tremendous discord and marital strife.

### **Undesirable Acts**

It is undesirable to talk excessively during intercourse. Talk should be limited to bare necessity and only words of love and tenderness uttered. Islam advocates dignity even at such occasions.

It is quite necessary that the mouth be cleansed before copulation for if contact is made by kissing, and there prevails a bad odour it may disturb the act of intimacy.

Total nudity during coition has been discouraged in Islam and is not advisable. This is in keeping with the natural human disposition of modesty and dignity which in its turn serves to maintain the sexual attraction between spouses.

Bashfulness is a special characteristic of women. If they lose it, they lose all charm. The modern condition of women has become such as to lead to the conclusion that they have lost all shame and decency. In order to maintain her charm and appeal a woman is advised to conceal rather than reveal. It is acknowledged that eroticism, or sexual love and attraction is defined as the art of concealing and not revealing. Despite being discouraged it is permissible though to look at the private parts of ones spouse and is not a sin in any way.

It is also undesirable to indulge in sex during the fifteenth night of the lunar month. It is related in the *Hadith* that the *shayatin* appear in larger numbers on this night.

It is also not advisable to cohabit during the specified congregational *Salah* times as this could lead to neglect of *Salah*.

During intercourse, caution should be taken that one does not face the *Qiblah*. This is regarded as an act of disrespect and should therefore be avoided as far as possible. Similarly, facing the feet in the direction of *Qiblah*, during intercourse is an undesirable practice.

## Oral Sex

Oral sex is an intimate form of sexual contact in which the wife or husband uses the mouth and tongue to stimulate the sexually sensitive areas of the other partner's body, especially the genital regions.

The *Shari'ah* remains silent on this issue. There are no direct references in the *Qur'an* or *Hadith* permitting or disallowing oral sex. This generally indicates that the individual has a margin of latitude in the matter.

In order to understand whether or not it is acceptable in Islam the following needs to be taken into consideration:

- 1) that it can be a practice which the wife or husband may find distasteful
- 2) if practiced, to do so with the permission of your wife or husband
- 3) that the genital area should be clean
- 4) that sexually transmitted diseases can be spread through oral sex

## Sex-Toys

The issue of the permissibility of sex-toys in Islam is to be assessed in the context of foreplay and masturbation. The issue of foreplay as a necessary ingredient to a satisfying sexual experience is addressed directly in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. For example:

*“Your wives are your fields. Go, then, into your fields as and whensoever you wish. But prepare for it adequately for yourselves (ie. foreplay); and fear Allah. And know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give (these) good tidings to those who believe.”*

There are many *Ahadith* on the matter, “...play with your wives and have her play with you?...” ; “...Every game a



*Muslim plays is futile (batil) except for archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife, for they are from praiseworthy acts.” ; “None of you should come onto his wife like an animal; but rather there should be between them a messenger.” It was said, “What is the messenger O Prophet of Allah?” He replied, “Foreplay of kissing and words.” ; “The Messenger of Allah forbade from engaging in sex before foreplay.” ; , “Do not begin intercourse until she has experienced desire like the desire you experience, lest you fulfil your desires before she does.”*

Sex-toys fall within the ambit of foreplay. Islamic scholars agree that all acts, including using sex-toys, that aim at satisfying and pleasing the spouses are permissible for as long as two things are strictly avoided, namely anal sex and having intercourse with a wife while she is still menstruating or experiencing post partum bleeding. There are some differences of opinion regarding the details of the matter but a summary of the rulings on sex-toys in Islam is as follows:

- 1) It should only be used in foreplay and in order to enhance the act of intercourse, not to substitute it.
- 2) It should not be used so often that it becomes an integral part of the intercourse, so much so that the spouse then cannot gain sexual gratification without it.
- 3) It should not cause any internal or external harm to the body
- 4) It should not contain any haraam ingredients,
- 5) It should not be inserted into the anus or into the vagina during menstruation.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the issue of inserting the sex-toy into the inner part of the vagina, and some Islamic scholars suggest that such toys should

be used only to stimulate the outer private parts, such as the clitoris.

Some Islamic scholars argue that using sex aids can have adverse effects on the relationship, namely:

- 1) The husband can become sexually lazy or the wife sexually selfish,
- 2) It may prevent normal husband-wife bonding that natural sex provides,
- 3) It can cause the wife to consider her husband inadequate or incapable of satisfying her naturally and, as such, jeopardise the relationship.

Thus some scholars argue that it is best to avoid using sex-toys altogether, whether the intention is to 'spice-up' one's relationship or to use it as a measure of last resort.

## **Fantasizing**

It is completely *Haram* (Prohibited) for a man or woman to indulge in fantasizing about others during sexual intercourse with their spouses. This is a grave sin in Islam and could veritably be termed the *zina* (adultery) of the mind and heart.

This point is clearly attested to in a saying of the Holy prophet ﷺ that reads : *“To gaze at a strange woman is adultery of the eyes. To listen to passionate words is adultery of the ears. To converse with a strange woman (and derive pleasure therefrom) is adultery of the tongue. To touch a strange woman is adultery of the hands, To walk towards her is adultery of the feet. The heart desires and craves (and this is adultery of the heart). The sexual organ then either testifies to these or denies them.”*

The “...*desire and craving of the heart...*” specifically refers to fantasizing.

## **Anal Sex**

Concerning the sensual relationship, these words of Allah ﷻ were revealed:

*“Your wives are a tillage unto you; so approach your tilth as and when you desire, and prepare for yourselves. Fear Allah and know that you will (one day) meet Him, and give glad tidings to the Believers.”*

A Muslim who fears Allah in his relationship with his wife and possesses the certainty that he will meet Him avoids the anus because the Prophet ﷺ said, *“Do not approach women from the anus.”*

He ﷺ referred to such an act as *“minor sodomy.”* In another *Hadith* He ﷺ stated *“...avoid the anus and intercourse during menstruation...”* And, *“The man who performs anal sex with his wife lies under the curse of Allah.”*

The Jews used to come to their wives by their backs i.e. from the anus. This was made unlawful by the Prophet ﷺ. He directed man to come by the natural way (ie. vagina canal) in whatever position they please. Coition is an act of procreation whereas this unnatural practice is not only filthy but unproductive, harmful and injurious to health.

A question may be asked regarding the status of coitus between the buttocks. In response understand that what is prohibited in sexual intercourse between spouses is the penetration of the penis into the anal opening. As for enjoying what is short of this, such as the buttocks, it is not prohibited. In fact, everything other than penetration of the anus is allowed.

## **Sex During Menstruation**

It is reported that the Jews and Zoroastrians used to go to

extremes in avoiding any physical contact with menstruating women, while the Christians continue to have sexual relations with them without regard to the flow of blood. The Arabs of the period of *Jahiliyyah* would not eat, drink, or sit with women who were menstruating and would send them to a separate dwelling just as the Jews and Zoroastrians did.

Accordingly, some Muslims asked the Prophet ﷺ about what is permitted and what is forbidden in relation to menstruating women. The following verse was then revealed:

*“And they ask thee about menstruation. Say: It is harmful, so refrain from women during their menstruation and do not approach them until they are cleansed. And when they have cleansed themselves you may go in to them in the manner ordained by Allah; indeed, Allah loves those who turn to Him and He loves those who are clean.”*

Some people understood the phrase, *“Refrain from women,”* as meaning that they should not live together in the same house during the menstrual periods.. The Prophet ﷺ then explained the correct meaning of this verse, saying, *“I ordered you only to refrain from having intercourse with menstruating women and did not tell you to send them out of the house as the foreigners do.”*

When the Jews of Madinah heard this they said, *“This man does not like to leave any part of what we do unchanged, but does the opposite.”*

Hazrat Aa'ishah رضي الله عنها said: *“When one amongst us (the wives of the Prophet ﷺ) menstruated, the Messenger of Allah would ask her to tie a waist wrapper over her body.”* (ie. to cover her private parts which according to *Imam Abu Hanifah* is between the navel and the knee) and then he would embrace her. In another *Hadith* Aa'ishah رضي الله عنها

said: “Whenever the Messenger of Allah wanted to be intimate with anyone of us (ie. his wives) during her menses he used to order her to put on a trouser and then be intimate with her.”

Thus the Muslim can fondle and enjoy his menstruating while avoiding intercourse. However, she must keep her body covered from the navel to knee. If sexual intercourse does occur during menses then it is necessary to repent and preferable to give a sum in charity as atonement.

The Islamic position in this regard is, as always, a middle one, between the one extreme of expelling the menstruating woman from the house and the other extreme of having intercourse with her.

Recent medical researchers have discovered that the menstrual flow contains toxic substances which may be detrimental if they gain entry into the body of the male or is prevented a clear passage of flow from the body of the female - both of which could easily occur if sexual intercourse takes place during intercourse. It would thus pose a potential threat to both husband and wife. This is a major contributing factor in the occurrence of painful and often critical venereal diseases. In fact, it's harmful effect can be passed on even to an unborn foetus.

Likewise, researchers have discovered that the reproductive organs become highly congested and the nerves very sensitive due to the secretion of the internal glands; consequently, intercourse may irritate them, possibly impeding the menstrual flow and causing inflammation of the sexual organs.

Sexual intercourse is however allowed during *Istihadhah* (bleeding due to some illness) because the *Shari'ah* considers her to be in a state of purity. There is therefore is no sin in having intercourse during *this time*.

## Obligatory Bath

The taking of a bath is rendered obligatory after sexual intercourse, menstrual discharge, child birth or nocturnal emissions. There is a consensus of opinion among the jurists that sexual intercourse necessitates a bath whether there is seminal emission or not.

It is reported that The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: *“When a man has sexual intercourse, bathing becomes obligatory for both the female and the male.”*

Aa'ishah رضي الله عنها has reported that when the Prophet ﷺ took a bath after intimacy, he first washed his hands, then his private parts with his left hand, then poured water over his left hand with his right hand. Then he performed ablution as he did for prayer, then wet his fingers and moved them through the roots of his hair till he was satisfied that the water reached the roots fully. Then poured three hands full over his head then poured water over all his body, then washed his feet.

Care should be taken that water flows into the beard and under the nails. A woman however need not undo her braids if the water reaches the roots. If any part of the body, even to the extent of a hair's breath is left dry, the bath shall not be complete. In such a case only that part should be washed which has remained dry and it is not necessary to repeat the bath again. Note that while bathing one should not sit facing the *Qiblah*.

## Concerning Masturbation

The pressing need to relieve himself of sexual tension may drive a young person to masturbation.

The majority of scholars consider it *haram*. *Imam* Malik bases his judgement on the verse,

*“Those who guard their sexual organs, except with their spouses or those whom their right hands possess, for (with regard to them) they are without blame. But those who crave something beyond that are transgressors.”*

...arguing that the masturbator is one of those who *“...crave something beyond that...”*

The *Hanbali* jurists permit masturbation only under two conditions: first, the fear of committing fornication or adultery, and second, not having the means to marry.

Once a young man asked *Hazrat Ibn Abbas* رضي الله عنه, *“I am a young man, I have got no wife. I fear sin in most cases and many a time I masturbate. Is there any sin in it ?”* Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه turned his face from him and said: *“Alas! It is better to marry a slave girl than to do that, but it is better than fornication.”*

Yet better than this is the Prophet’s advice to the Muslim youth who is unable to marry, namely, that he seek help through frequent fasting, for fasting nurtures will. power, teaches control of desires, and strengthens the fear of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ said, *“Young men, those of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at women (lit., lowers your gaze) and preserves your chastity; but those who cannot should fast, for it is a means of cooling sexual passion.”*

In the context of marriage the following needs to be taken into consideration:

- 1) sex is to be enjoyed within marriage between man and wife
- 2) marriage is encouraged to discourage sexual frustration
- 3) sexually arousing oneself can become a habit and lead to sexual selfishness
- 4) this can result in less effort being spent in either

finding a suitable marriage partner or in working to improve your sexual relationship with your spouse

## **Sexual Perversion**

Homosexuality is a perverted act, a reversal of the natural order, a corruption of man's sexuality, and a crime against the rights of women. The spread of this depraved practice in a society disrupts its natural life pattern and makes those who practice it slaves to their lusts, depriving them of decent taste, decent morals, and a decent manner of living. The story of the people of the prophet Lut عليه السلام (Lot) as narrated in the Qur'an should be sufficient for us. Lut's عليه السلام people were addicted to this shameless depravity, abandoning natural, pure, lawful relations with women in the pursuit of this unnatural, foul and illicit practice.

Islam prescribes capital punishment for Homosexuals. While such punishment may seem cruel, they have been instituted to maintain the purity of society and to keep it clean of perverted elements. Homosexuality is not only an abomination but also unbecoming to human dignity and respect. Two persons of the same sex may be attracted to each other but this mutual attraction should manifest a unification of the souls and not a misuse and debasement of their bodies. It is one of the major sins Islam. The Holy Qur'an says:

*"And We sent Lut as a Messenger: Remember that he said to his people, "Have you become so shameless that you commit such indecent acts as no one committed before you in the world? You gratify your lust with men instead of women: indeed you are a people who are transgressors of all limits."*

*(7: 80, 81)*

Here and at other places the Holy Qur'an declares that



sodomy is a heinous sin that warrants the wrath of Allah ﷻ.

*“Allah ﷻ will not look with mercy at man who comes to a man (with lust) or to a woman from her anus.”*

Although wicked people have always been committing this most heinous sin yet it has always been considered a detestable act. The only people who have ever tried to justify it or raise it to the point of representing a moral virtue, were the Greek Philosophers in the ancient world, and now the European nations in the modern world. The latter are doing their utmost to propagate and have succeeded, to a large extent, in giving this filthy act legal sanction. So much so that the legislatures of many countries have legalized it. It does not require any elaborate argument to show that homosexuality is a wicked social crime and a heinous sin.

The Creator has made the male and the female of each and every living species different from, and complementary to, each other. In this way alone can humankind construct families which are the foundation of civilized life. The one who satisfies this sexual urge in an unnatural way becomes guilty of many crimes at one and the same time.

1) Such a one, so to speak, wages a war against the natural and physical functioning's of his organs and those of the victims of his lust. This inevitably produces very harmful effects on their physiques, their minds and their morality.

2) He becomes guilty of treachery and dishonesty against Nature for he enjoys sexual pleasure, without performing the necessary service of his species and civilization and without fulfilling the rights and obligations attached to it.

3) He commits a breach of trust against society in general for he enjoys all the benefits of the civilized

society, but in turn does not take on himself the responsibilities of the married life and wastes all his energies in the unnatural gratification of his sexual desires. This selfish and unworthy attitude is not only useless but also positively harmful to the collective morality. Thus he makes himself unfit for the service of the family and of the human race and produces unnatural feminine characteristics in, at least, one other male and opens the way to adultery and moral degradation for at least two women.

### **About Homosexuality and Sexual Preference**

As Muslims, we believe that homosexuality is unnatural and impure; it is against the law of nature in which we have been created. As mentioned above, Allah created men and women as complements of each other; we should help each other, marry and have children together. Each gender has its own special qualities and neither sex is whole or complete without the other. The bodies of men and women are designed to naturally fit together during sexual intercourse.

On the other hand, men who want to satisfy their sexual urges with other men do not have this advantage. They are compelled to invent all kinds of unnatural and impure substitutes, such as anal sex, which is strictly forbidden in Islam.

As if this wasn't bad enough, many homosexuals (and some heterosexuals) enjoy hurting or being hurt by their partners, through tying or chaining each other up, and whipping or beating each other (called sado-masochism). Those who indulge in these deviant practices often wear black leather clothing with chains and metal spikes, shave their heads and try to look 'tough'. How far removed is this from the lovely way Allah created for married people to express their love for each other.

The reaction of most people when hearing about this behavior is to feel disgust. Until a short time ago, almost all societies and cultures around the world strongly disapproved of homosexuality, so homosexuals usually kept their behaviour secret. The story of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is found in the Bible as well as the Qur'an. They were cities whose people practised homosexuality openly. Allah sent His Prophet Lot (peace be upon him) to them, to warn them of His impending punishment. When they did not give up their evil practices, Allah destroyed their cities, one morning, with a shower of stones.

During the past few decades, however, homosexuals have become more and more open about themselves. Many of them are active in fighting for more rights. They hold parades and protests and attempt to change the laws which limit their freedom. In big cities, it is possible to see men kissing each other in public or men dressed up as women (called transvestites). In some places men may even 'marry' men, and women 'marry' women! These homosexual couples demand to be treated like normal married couples. Although they cannot have children together, sometimes they adopt children to raise as their own. If anyone dares to say that any of these things are morally wrong, they label him 'homophobic' (afraid of homosexuals)! The question is, how did this mixed-up state of affairs come about?

During the 1960's, development of the birth control pill and the legalization of abortion led to the sexual revolution. People in more liberal societies began to say that they should be free to have sexual relations with whomever they wanted - whether they were married or not, and whether they were of the same sex or the opposite - and that they should be accepted and respected for their personal choice. Many people began to listen to and accept these ideas, with the result that it has become

against the law in many countries to discriminate against a person because of his or her sexual preference or orientation - that is, because they prefer to be homosexual.

How does a person become homosexual? Is it something that he can choose, or is it something which he is 'born' with, which he discovers as he grows up? Until the 1970s, homosexuality was considered by most doctors to be a kind of mental illness. They said that some weak boys with cruel and cold mothers grew up to hate all women, and some girls who were abused by their fathers grew up to hate all men; they would then seek love and comfort in people of the same sex. Then doctors came up with the theory that homosexuality was something in the genes which could be inherited, because some families have more homosexuals than others (of course, it is also possible that homosexuality runs in families because of how the children are treated and raised in those particular families). Some scientists discovered that certain animals also engage in homosexual behaviour, so they concluded that it can be normal and acceptable for humans as well (think about this: is everything which wild animals do natural for humans?).

In this way, homosexuality has become more accepted by people in liberal societies. Young people who have strong feelings of love and friendship for a friend of the same sex are sometimes confused by all this talk of homosexuality and sex in general, and begin to wonder if they, too, are gay. Just because a girl is so happy with her best friend that she has the urge to give her a big hug and kiss, she may feel guilty about those urges, confusing them with sexual feelings. If she becomes convinced that she is a lesbian, she may try to get her girlfriend to engage in sexual behaviour with her. In other cases, a person may not have anyone else to turn to for love and affection. Teenagers who have poor relationships with

their parents and relatives need to be touched and loved by someone. If the only friend they have is someone of the same sex, the overwhelming need to touch and hold someone may overcome their sense of decency, and lead to sexual behavior. There are also young people who are taken advantage of by adult homosexuals and pushed into these acts against their will, until they become accustomed to it. Finally, some people are born with or develop rare diseases as a result of which they do not have enough male or female hormones to make them look and behave like normal men or women. Hormones are chemicals produced in various organs of the body which are responsible for physical sex characteristics (such as the growth of female breasts) as well as much of the behavior we call masculine (like the desire to fight and show off) or feminine (like the desire to cuddle babies). A young man without enough male hormones might not be able to grow a beard, his voice might not deepen as it should, and he might not feel masculine inside. These kinds of illnesses can usually be helped with medical treatment; they are not an excuse to become a homosexual.

Homosexuality is considered a major sin and crime in Islam; the Prophet Muhammad told us that homosexuals are cursed by Allah, as are the men who imitate or dress up as women, and the women who imitate or dress up as men. Therefore, gay people and transvestites are punished in countries which apply Islamic law. Although individual Muslims should not attack homosexuals, we do not have to accept homosexuality, even if we become unpopular for saying so. Just as the rights of homosexuals are protected by law, our right to freedom of religious belief is also protected by law.

## **Society and Sexual Alternatives**

So far as the interaction between society, morality and

sex is concerned, there are four choices apparently open to any society:

- 1) an entirely homosexual society;
- 2) an entirely promiscuous society;
- 3) a society in which no sexual relations exist except between husband and wife;
- 4) a laissez-faire society in which all the above forms are tolerated.

Which of these four choices can be said to promote the welfare of individuals and society? In answering this question, it should be reasonable and natural to say that only those relationships that help to promote people's welfare ought to be commended and described as moral. Also, whatever can be shown to have dangerous anti-social consequences cannot be considered morally right or good.

A society of homosexuals only will mean the death of mankind since it severs sexual behaviour from its reproductive function. Homosexuals advocate a view of human relationships that is at odds with the natural order and stability of human society. We do not need to go into the perverse nature and the detrimental consequences of homosexuality as discussed above which is described in the Qur'an as an "abomination" and those who indulge in it as "committing excesses".

An entirely promiscuous society is thought by some to be the best. In such a society, it is imagined that everyone will have complete freedom to choose whoever he likes at whatever time he prefers. With such freedom will come the deepest enjoyment as well as the reproduction of the species.

The reality will be different and there will be frightful

difficulties. People will become obsessed with sex. Strange as it may seem, sexual deprivation will be a major problem. Incest and deviant behaviour will be common as it is in many societies that are promiscuous. Sexually transmitted diseases will spread rapidly.

The effects of all this on human values and behaviour are incalculable. Overall, it will have a degrading effect on sex itself and on human relationships.

Sex will not be seen in the context of a whole, loving relationship, but will become an end in itself and in the process destroy respect, love, care and responsibility in human relationships.

Some of these effects can already be seen in several societies. Many criminal tendencies both among the young and among the old are discovered to have their origins in broken homes and unstable families. The most efficient social services cannot cope with the legions of parentless children which a promiscuous society produces. And there is the terrible cost in terms of personal pain and agony of children naturally wanting to know who is their father or indeed who is their mother? In many countries of the world today, more than half the population is illegitimate. If present trends continue, the figures will keep on rising.

Some might say: Well, no one has ever seriously advocated a completely homosexual society or a completely promiscuous society. All we want is a society where every individual or group of individuals shall have the freedom to lead the kind of sexual life they prefer. In such a mixed society, married people, will live side by side with promiscuous individuals and homosexuals. Each will respect the ideas and choices of the others and tolerate their behaviour. We must be tolerant for

tolerance is a great virtue.

But this will not do either.

If we can see clearly and if we then admit that the consequences of homosexuality and promiscuity are harmful, it is not reasonable or natural to tolerate the factors responsible for them.

Tolerating homosexuality and promiscuity means encouraging them and pushing more and more people to practice them. Marital relationships will be affected. Married people may even be regarded as odd or “eccentric” in such a society and may even not be tolerated as the example of Lot’s people shows:

*“And remember Lot when he said to his people, ‘Will you commit abominations such as none in all the world has ever done before you? Verily, with lust you approach men instead of women. Indeed, you are a people given to excesses! But his people’s only answer was this: ‘Expel them from your land! They are folk who make themselves out to be pure’.”*

(27: 56)

By elimination then, the society with the most good and the least evil is a society based on the family and marital relationships. Married people in such a society will not tolerate but do their best to eradicate the causes of homosexuality, promiscuity and sexual laissez faire. This will be the rational society with the best hope of happiness. In such a society:

- sex is enjoyed within marriage without being given undue prominence over other needs and values;
- sex does not become the purpose of life but an



important ingredient which helps to make it more happy and enjoyable;

- children are born and well-looked after.

The best way of achieving these aims is:

- 1) to have a healthy attitude towards sex;
- 2) to exhort people to marry and to marry for the proper reasons;
- 3) to show them how best to preserve and enjoy their married life;
- 4) to make it possible for them to terminate an unsuccessful marriage;
- 5) to lessen the factors which may tempt them to look for sexual satisfaction outside marriage;
- 6) to severely punish those who seek sexual gratification in non-marital avenues, whether pre-marital or extra-marital avenues (NB: capital punishments however are only applicable in an Islamic state).

## **Conclusion**

The human species is biologically a pair-forming species. This may be shown by observation and is also mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the signs of Allah's wisdom, love and care.

*"And among Allah's wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you. In this, behold, there are signs indeed for people who think."*

The need for sexual relations is natural for adults. If this need is naturally fulfilled within marriage, it does not carry any feelings of immorality, guilt and sin. In fact, just as adultery, fornication and homosexuality are punishable

offences, satisfying sexual needs within marriage merits reward. The Prophet once remarked that a man is to be rewarded for performing the sexual act with his wife, and when some of his surprised listeners wondered how could a person be rewarded for satisfying his own desire, the noble Prophet said:

*"Do you not see that if he were to satisfy it in a prohibited manner he would be committing a sin? So if he satisfies it in a lawful manner, he will be recompensed."*

A Muslim husband and wife who come to perform the sexual act, do not do so with guilty consciences or the feeling that they are about to do something that degrades them or remove them further from Allah. They come with the feeling of doing something which God approves and for which He gives a good reward. Following the example of the Prophet, they perform it in the name of Allah.



## SEX & SEXUALITY IN ISLAM

According to Islam, life is not a wretched prison or a dark grave, nor is it a happy hunting ground where one is absolutely free to 'hunt' whatever one desires. It is life worth living, provided one endeavours to live within proper moral limits. Thus in the ideal life of Islam there is no place for shifting the natural, psychic impulses. Its approach to life is not negative, "a systematic slaying of all the propensities of life" or self-mortification. Islam exhorts its followers to live life with full zest and vigour.

In other religions, piety lies in denying oneself the relish of life, whereas in Islam piety is attained in throwing oneself resolutely and joyfully into the arms of life, but not be overpowered by its carnal temptations. It encourages healthy enjoyments and one out of these is the satisfaction of the sexual desire. Islam does not associate the idea of sexual pleasure with that of sin and vice. Pleasure gives strength to the moral facet of a man provided one does not transgress the limits of its ethical code.

Islam believes that there is nothing superfluous and nothing evil in human impulses. They are creative forces given to man provided they are properly made use of.