

Intimate Issues

(part 1 of 2): Sex and Marriage in Islam



Islam is a holistic way of life. It takes into account all of humankind's needs; spiritual, emotional and physical. Part of physical wellbeing includes sexual wellbeing and health. God created sex not only for procreation but to fulfil humankind's need for intimacy. Islam leaves no part of our lives unexplained and thus sexuality and intimacy are not topics that the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, shy away from or neglect.

Islam encourages marriage and has made it the only means through which one can satisfy their sexual needs. There are well-known consequences if a person engages in premarital relationships or behaves in a promiscuous manner. These include unwanted pregnancies, the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, family breakdown in cases of adultery and emotional difficulties arising from relationships without commitment. Islam is aware of these complications and cautions the person who does not take the matter seriously. Islam defines pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships as great sins.

“Nor come closer to illicit sexual intimacy for it is a shameful and immoral, opening the door (to other immorality).” (Quran 17:32)

When a man or woman is able to marry, they should be encouraged and aided in their attempts to get married. Also when the intention has been made clear, the couple should marry as quickly as possible to discourage any temptation to fall into sin. Prophet Muhammad encouraged marriage however he encouraged fasting for those who did not have the means to marry. He said:

“Whoever among you possesses the physical and financial resources to marry should do so, because it helps one to guard their modesty, and whoever is unable to marry should fast, as fasting diminishes one’s sexual desire.”^[1]

God, in infinite wisdom guides us away from the potentially destructive behaviour of pre-marital or extra-marital relationships and towards behaviour that allows us to live God centred lives while enjoying the closeness of a loving relationship. In fact God rewards us for intimacy with our lawful partner. Prophet Muhammad told his companions that “In the sexual act of each of you there is charity.” The Companions asked, “When one of us fulfils his sexual desire, will he be given a reward for that?” And he said, “Do you not think that were he to act upon it unlawfully, he would be sinning? Likewise, if he acts upon it lawfully he will be rewarded.”^[2]

Giving pleasure to one’s spouse is a highly rewarding deed. Marriage itself is viewed in Islam as the longest, most continuous act of worship a Muslim will perform in the course of their lives. It is a partnership between two who seek to please God; thus, sexual intimacy between spouses is the ‘spark’ that strengthens this bond. As each person strives to fulfil the rights and needs of the other, an affection and fondness is achieved. God stresses that a person will find intimacy and comfort in a lawful union.

**“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.”
(Quran 30:21)**

Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, was known as a loving husband and a family man. He was known to speak frankly to his companions, both men and women, when they asked him about matters of a sexual nature. For example his responses to questions included such wise advice as, “None of you should fall upon his wife like an animal; let their be a ‘messenger’ between you.” “And what is a messenger?” they asked, and he replied: “Kisses and words.”^[3]

Prophet Muhammad said: “If one of you says, when he has intercourse with his wife: ‘I begin with the name of God, O God, keep Satan away from me and keep Satan away from that which You bestow upon us,’ if it is decreed that they should have a child, Satan will never harm him.”^[4]

Prophet Muhammad was never embarrassed and strove to provide clear and understandable answers about all sorts of subjects including menstruation and orgasm. A woman once asked the Prophet if she needed to take a bath after a wet dream to which he replied, “Yes, if she sees liquid.”^[5]

God has ordained that our spouses be like our garments and that the husband and wife protect each other and be close companions. However marriage has many psychological, emotional and physical aspects to it and all

matters relating to physical, emotional and spiritual health must be addressed, because all three areas are vital for the marriage to survive in a healthy way. God has given permission for married couples to fulfil their desires in many and varied ways and positions.

“Your wives are a tilth for you, so go to your tilth when and how you will, and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear God, and know that you will (one day) meet Him...” (Quran 2:223)

The Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad also educate and advise us of any prohibitions within the confines of marriage. It is taken and understood from the above verse of the Quran that within a marriage both the man and woman have the right to enjoy each other’s bodies and intimate companionship however they must avoid having sex when the woman is menstruating or bleeding after childbirth and they must never engage in anal sex.

In part 2 we will look at prohibitions in the bedroom and discuss sex education and its ability to teach children healthy Islamic attitudes towards marriage, sex and body image.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

[2] *Saheeh Muslim*

[3] *Musnad Al Firdaus- imām Daylami*

[4] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[5] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

(part 2 of 2): Bedroom Etiquette

Islam offers clear guidelines for all worldly matters. God did not create us and then abandon us to the cosmos. He set out all that we need to know in the Quran and followed it up with the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. God did not leave us floundering about in a sea of misconceptions and misunderstandings; Prophet Muhammad educated us and taught us that one should ask if they do not know. Of course this indicates that one should be open and truthful and never shy away from asking difficult or embarrassing questions. Thus a lot of what we understand about bedroom etiquette comes from the questions asked by the people around the Prophet, may God praise him.

God says to enjoy each other’s intimate company, to take pleasure, comfort and delight in the intimacy of marriage but He also sets out a few rules about unacceptable behaviour. We learned in article 1 that refraining from sexual

intercourse when the woman is menstruating or still bleeding after childbirth is essential. Both husband and wife should satisfy each other's sexual needs and take into consideration the guidance of the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him. God, the Exalted, says:

And they ask you concerning menstruation. Say, "It is a harmful thing, so keep away from women during menstruation, and go not in unto them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them from where God has ordained for you. Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves." (Quran 2:222)

Post natal bleeding is treated in the same way as menstruation. A couple should refrain from intercourse during this time and only recommence once the wife has performed the ritual bath.

We also learned that anal intercourse is a grave sin. Prophet Muhammad said that the one who had anal intercourse with his wife was cursed.^[1] In another documented tradition he said specifically to avoid the anus and having sex during the time of menstruation.^[2] Even if anal intercourse is performed with the consent of the wife, or if she is menstruating, it is still a grave sin. Mutual agreement does not allow something that has been made forbidden.

Homosexuality (sex between members of the same gender) is also forbidden. Homosexuality is not accepted in Islam and this website can provide you with more information on the reasons for this prohibition.

It is permissible for a husband and wife to masturbate each other. This comes under the rulings derived from the verse that encourages a married couple to enjoy and delight each other. **"Your wives are a tilth for you, so go to your tilth when and how you will..." (Quran 2:223)**

As far as the issue of oral sex is concerned, it is also a part of enjoying each other's company and it is governed by two conditions; it must not cause harm or degradation to either spouse, as well impurities must not be swallowed.

Having sex, even lawful sex will invalidate a fast. Thus a couple must abstain from it while fasting. This may pose as a problem during the month of Ramadan, wherein a Muslim fasts around 30 days, but God has allowed married couples to engage in it after the fast has been broken.

"It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for sexual relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. God knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which God has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes

distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset...” (Quran 2:187)

The issue of sex education is often debated in Muslim communities but there is no doubt that Islamic education must include a component that explains intimate matters. It is the responsibility of parents to prepare and educate their children about all aspects of their lives, including the physical and emotional changes that take place at puberty, and the Islamic position on sexuality.

Sadly within the Muslim community there are many misunderstandings about sexuality. Many husbands neglect the right of sexual fulfillment that is owed to their spouses. They may even believe that a wife cannot be virtuous and sexual at the same time. Feeling desire does not mean that a woman is promiscuous and Prophet Muhammad advised husbands to let their wives achieve sexual fulfillment. He spoke about the importance of foreplay and using loving words during intimacy. Sexual dissatisfaction is considered legitimate grounds for divorce on the part of either the wife or husband. Such issues can be overcome with age appropriate sex education.

The relationship between a husband and wife is the foundation on which a family is built and good strong families are what make a strong community of believers. Intimate issues between the husband and wife should always be seen as something special and private. It is a right for both men and women. God alludes to it in the verse, “...**They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them ...**” (Quran 2: 187) The word clothing symbolises a covering; just as a garment protects one’s body spouses, as well, act as a covering for each other by protecting one another’s secrets, honour and shortcomings. In intimate situations words are spoken, secrets told, souls are laid bare. These issues must be kept between the married couple except in circumstances of dire need such as medical matters.

Footnotes:

[1] *Abu Dawood, Imam Ahmad*

[2] *Ibid*