

Preface to the First Edition

This book is the result of a need which I sensed after my first three years in Canada. A person in my position as a religious guide is always confronted by people with questions related to their religious and personal problems.

Unlike the atmosphere in the East where the contact is more on a personal level, the contact in this part of the world is more through correspondence and telephone calls. I soon realized that whenever the question was 'embarrassing' or related to sexual behavior, the caller would prefer not to give his or her name.

And, of course, I had no reason to insist on knowing the identity of the callers; my only duty is to listen and convey the Islamic view to those who seek.

However, what was most interesting about these 'embarrassing' questions was that in majority of cases the callers were feeling guilty for actions that were absolutely permissible in Islam. But because of their ignorance or misinformation, they had been feeling guilty for things which were not at all forbidden in the Islamic shari'ah.

And I said to myself: There must be many more people out there who are going through similar experience, feeling guilty and depressed; and all this because of ignorance! Not all have the courage to talk on such issues or even call without revealing their identity. And so I decided that I have to do something.

I started writing on the sexual morality of Islam. This was in 1986. When I finished the initial draft, I thought that the material might be considered too controversial, and so I decided to test the water before publishing the book.

A lecture on 'Sex and Marriage in Islam' was organized on November 9, 1986 at the Shi'a Muslim Community Center in Vancouver. The vast majority of the community members responded very positively. A lady from the audience wrote a letter which expresses the reaction of the majority. She wrote:

"Thank you very much for the excellent lecture you delivered us on Sunday, November 9th. I must say that you are very brave and you presented the material with great calmness and poise. So far we have never had a Maulana who shared such an invaluable knowledge to educate our community... From my own experience, your educative lecture has clarified many doubts as to what is allowed in our shari'ah..."

Later on I came to know that the video cassette of the lecture was sent to different places as far as England and East Africa. Since I had mentioned in the video that this is the draft of a forth-coming book, I started getting inquiries about it. The response further encouraged me to go ahead with the publication of the book.

However, the publication was, unfortunately, delayed for three years because of my involvement in some other activities. During the last months of 1989, Almighty Allah blessed me with the opportunity to finalize the book. While finalizing the book, I started adding many discussions which eventually doubled the size of the initial draft of 1986 and increased its academic value. This, I hope, will redeem me in the eyes of my readers for the three years delay.

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Chapter One gives a short historical review of the Western sexual morality. This sets the tone for the next chapter which presents the basic view of Islam on marriage and sex. In this chapter, I have also critically reviewed the ideas of an Arab feminist, Fatima Mernissi, on woman's sexuality in Islam. The remaining three chapters deal with the practical aspects of marriage: sexual relations; contraceptives and abortion; and new techniques in human reproduction.

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In the last three chapters of the book, the reader will find a variety of opinions among the Shi'ah *mujtahids*. (*Mujtahids* means jurists, the experts of Islamic laws.) The difference of opinion is an essential part of *ijtihad* which is still a live institution in Shi'ah Islam. I have also clearly given the opinions of the most high-ranking Shi'ah *mujtahids* of our time, in particular Ayatullah al-'uzma Sayyid Abu 'l-Qasim al-Musawi al-Khu'i and the late Ayatullah al-'uzma al-Imam Sayyid Ruhullah al-Musawi al-Khumayni.

However, I must clarify at the very outset that there are some issues on which the present writer has given his own opinions. This has been done mostly in those cases where the present *mujtahids* have no opinion. In any case, since all the views have been mentioned clearly, the *muqallidin* (followers) of the present *mujtahids* can use this book without any concern about the validity of their actions.

I hope this book will receive even better reception than the video of 1986; and I pray to Allah, *subhanahuwa ta'ala*, to guide me to the best of opinions and accept this work as a small contribution towards serving Islam. *Inna rabbi la Sami'u 'd-du'a*.

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