



*We received an e-mail enquiry recently from a non-Muslim lady requesting information concerning the issue of sexual relations and menopause in Islam. We felt that her question warranted a more thorough approach, so we decided to publish our answer on this website. Here is her original letter to us and our initial response to her. **Please note her name and e-mail address have been withheld.***

Her original letter to us:

I saw your posting on soc.religion.islam and hope you don't mind my writing you.

I've been trying to find information on how Islam, specifically the Qur'an, deals with the subject of sex. I am sure this may seem like a set-up of some sort but please let me assure you, it is not.

I'm on several menopause mailing lists, and the subject of sex and religion has come up. Some religions feel that sex should be only for procreation and not for enjoyment. With menopause putting an end to a woman's fertility, those religions would appear to be saying that once a woman reaches menopause, she shouldn't be having sex.

I've been submerging myself in Islam newsgroups and books for the past month, and for the life of me, I can not find the reference that indicated that Islam dictates sexual relations only within marriage, and only for procreation.

Am I wrong? I'd appreciate any references that you might be able to provide. Please feel free to forward this message to anyone you feel may be able to help me. . . **end of letter**

Our initial e-mail response to her:

Thank you for your enquiry . . .

Briefly, here are some quick answers to your two questions:

1. Procreation is NOT the only purpose of marriage in Islam, because a secondary purpose is also companionship and enjoyment.
2. Menopause does NOT put an end to sexual relations in a Muslim marriage.

End of our initial e-mail response to her

This more detailed response now follows . . .

Sex in Islam - Its Role and Purpose

by Syed Mumtaz Ali & Rabia Mills

In the Islamic faith, the first and the foremost and the most reliable and highest form of religious law for faithful Muslims is contained within the holy Qur'an. The Prophetic Traditions (also known as *Hadith*, which are the sayings and doings and tacit approval of things said or done in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h.)^(u) are a second source of law. With that said, we hope the following reply will answer your question.

According to Islam, procreation is **not** the sole and only purpose of marriage. While procreation is a primary purpose, companionship and enjoyment of the spouse along with avoidance of unlawful or sinful relationships are also secondary purposes. These secondary purposes play their own important roles in the Islamic teachings which govern sexual relations. In other words, although procreation is definitely an **aim**, it is **not an exclusive aim**. Procreation is the major purpose, but nonetheless enjoyment and other purposes also play significant roles in married life as evidenced by the Islamic teachings which relate to sexual relations. Although the primary **purpose** of sex is procreation, the Qur'an does not forbid it when a woman reaches

menopause. For example, in the Qur'an is the story is about the Prophet Zakariya a.s.⁽²⁾ (Christian spelling -- Zakaria) [see Qur'an 19:1-15] who had fathered a child well into his old age. One verse in particular reads:

"He [Zakariya] said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have grown quite decrepit from old age?"
[Qur'an 19:8]
"He said: "So (it will be): thy Lord saith, "That is easy for Me: I did indeed create thee before, when thou hadst been nothing!"
[Qur'an 19:9]

The Qur'anic reference above, then, shows the case of a couple carrying on sexual relations well into old age. This in turn signifies that these relations are allowed within marriage and into old age for Muslim couples.

You will recall that this same story is found in the Old Testament with reference to Zakaria a.s. who was made to be mute for three days and nights as a sign from God.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that even in our relatively recent times, history has recorded the fact that the great Sufi *Shaikh*, Abdul Qadir Gilani r.a., was born on the 1st day of Ramadan 470 A.H [some historians say 471 A.H] which corresponds to March 18, 1078 A.D. His mother was 60 years of age at the time of his birth.

In terms of the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h. we can see another meaningful example of this in the life of the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. married his first wife (Khadija aged 40) when he was 25 years old, and he remained monogamous throughout his entire 26 years of marriage to her. He then married A'isha at the age of 54, but this was three years after the death of Khadija. It was after this marriage that he then took other wives. By the way, many non-Muslim writers have directed a great deal of unjust criticism against him for this. In fact all of these women were quite old or were widows who had been left destitute and without protection during those troubled times. And so as the head of State at Medina, the only proper way (according to Arab code) in which Muhammad p.b.u.h. could extend both protection and maintenance to them was by marriage.⁽³⁾ [see also Appendix A] Those marriages were not only consummated, but ancillary sexual relations have also been reported to us through the Hadith literature. Hence another proof that sexual relations are considered acceptable well into old age. "Polygamy was not always considered to be so reprehensible as it is now. For

example, St. Augustine himself observed that there was no intrinsic immorality or sinfulness in it, and declared that polygamy was not a crime where it was the legal institution of a country."⁽⁴⁾ This subject matter, however, is another topic altogether. [see also Appendix B]

We have reproduced an excerpt on our website by Dr. M.A. Rauf from his book '*Marriage in Islam*'. In this excerpt, Dr. Rauf discusses in great detail the advantages and possible disadvantages of marriage. Among the advantages that he discusses are procreation, fulfilment of the natural urge, companionship, comfort and relief to the soul, and so on. He also discusses the disadvantages and the types of burdens and risks involved with marriage. All of the advantages or benefits are in effect meant to be regarded as the secondary purpose of marriage which supplement its major aim or purpose, namely procreation. We would highly recommend that you read this excerpt for a more complete understanding of our present response to you.

With regards to your question regarding menopause, we would also strongly suggest that you read the book '*The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam*' by Imam al-Ghazzali.⁽⁵⁾ [see also Appendix C] We would particularly refer you to where al-Ghazzali explains the rationale and reasoning for the recommendation of marriage - even for the impotent. In his Conclusion, al-Ghazzali discusses the other purposes of marriage and that is to fulfil the natural sexual desires as well as to experience its joy and protection from the perils of lust.

If one cohabits with one's own wife -- not for carnal pleasure alone, but for performing the duty imposed by God -- it would be an act of piety and devotion, meriting the pleasure and reward from God and this is as the Prophet p.b.u.h. has observed. This is what has been described as **spiritualizing temporal duties**. [see also Appendix D] You might also refer to where Imam al-Ghazzali discusses the subject of relaxation and recreation for the soul and so on.

Islam also prescribes certain rules of sexual etiquette. Imam al-Ghazzali also sets out the Prophetic Traditions which deal with the pleasures of 'foreplay' and other similar enjoyments that are permitted when the wife is menstruating. Not permitted, however, is to go so far as to copulate by means of penetration into the vagina during menstruation.

Islam has declared fornication (which by definition in Islam includes adultery) unlawful, and it goes to great lengths to make it repugnant by sanction and deterrent. It has even gone so far as to make any alliances of this type of unlawful sexual relationship a heinous sin and an odious offence. In other words, sexual relations of any kind, that fall outside of lawful marriage, are absolutely

forbidden. For example:

"Nor come nigh to adultery for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)." [Qur'an 17:32]

"The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication - flog each of them with a hundred stripes. Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of the Believers witness their punishment." [Qur'an 24:2]

"Those who bring the charge of adultery against chaste women but cannot produce four witnesses to prove the charge, give them 80 lashes and their testimony should never be believed." [Qur'an 24:4]

Four Prophetic Traditions [Hadith]:

1. "Said the Prophet: 'A grievously heinous sin in the estimation of God is to commit adultery with a woman living in one's neighbourhood'" [Bukhari & Muslim]
2. " He or she who casts a lewd glance at another and allows himself of herself to be attracted likewise, both meet the displeasure of God." [Dailami]
3. "There is nothing which God abhors more than adultery."
4. "Observed the Prophet: 'Whenever a calamity befalls a centre of population, take it for granted that immorality is rampant in that place.' [Dailami]

More Qur'anic quotes and Hadith:

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." [Qur'an 30:21]

"And those who pray, "Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous." [Qur'an 25:74]

"Your wives are a tilth unto you; so go to your tilth when or how you will." [Qur'an 2:223]

Hadith: "Narrated Abdullah Ibn Abbas: Ibn Umar

misunderstood (the Qur'anic verse, "So come to your tilth however you will") - may Allah forgive him. The fact is that this clan of the Ansar, who were idolaters, lived in the company of the Jews who were the people of the Book. They (the Ansar) accepted their superiority over themselves in respect of knowledge and the followed most of their actions. The people of the Book (i.e., the Jews) used to have intercourse with their women on one side alone (i.e., lying on their backs). This was the most concealing position for (the vagina of) the women. This clan of the Ansar adopted this practice from them. But this tribe of the Quraysh used to uncover their women completely, and seek pleasure with them from in front and behind and laying them on their backs.

When the *muhajirun* (the immigrants) came to Medina, a man married a woman of the Ansar. He began to do the same kind of action with her, but she disliked it, and said to him: We were approached on one side (i.e. lying on the back); do it so, otherwise keep away from me. The matter of theirs spread widely and it reached the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him).

So Allah, the Exalted, sent down the Qur'anic verse: "Your wives are a tilth to you, so come to your tilth however you will," i.e., from in front, from behind or lying on the back. But this verse meant the place of the delivery of the child, i.e., the vagina." [from the *Hadith* literature: Sunan Abu-Dawud, Book 11, Number 2159]

*"Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. **They are your garments and ye are their garments.**" [Qur'an 2:187]*

*"It is He Who has created you from a single person (Adam), and (then) He has created from him his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], in order that he might **enjoy the pleasure** of living with her . . ." [Qur'an 7:189]*

*"And Allah has made for you **mates (and companions)** of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best: will they then believe in vain things, and be ungrateful for Allah's favours?" [Qur'an 16:72]*

Hadith: On the authority of Abu Dharr : Some of the companions of the messenger of Allah said : " O Messenger of Allah, the affluent have made off with the rewards, they pray as we pray they fast as we fast, and they give away in charity the superfluity of their wealth."

He said: "Has not Allah made things for you to give away in charity? Every *tasbihah* is a charity, every *takbirah* is a charity, every *tahmidah* is a charity, and every *tahlilah* is a charity, to enjoin a good action is a charity, to forbid an evil action is a charity, and in the sexual act of each of you there is a charity." They said: "O Messenger of Allah, when one of us fulfils his sexual desire will he have some reward for that?" He said: "Do you not think that were he to act upon it unlawfully he would be sinning? Likewise, if he has acted upon it lawfully he will have a reward." [Muslim]

Appendix A

From "*Life of Muhammad*" by A.H. Hamid Siddiqui. Hilal Publications, Calcutta 1981. Pages 243-247.

Marriages of the Holy Prophet

"He was hardly twenty-five years of age when he married Khadijah, who was fifteen years older than himself. It was with her and her alone that he passed all the years of his youth and manhood until she died three years before Hijra, when he was already a man of fifty. After the sad demise of Khadijah, he again went in for a widow, this time a helpless one in great distress. She was one of the earliest converts to Islam who had suffered many hardships for the cause of Truth.

The Holy Prophet married A'ishah, the daughter of his devoted friend Abu Bakr. She was the only virgin wife of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Events took a very serious turn in Medina. The enmity of the Quraysh resulted in armed battles in which so many of the noble Muslims fell as martyrs. It was, therefore, the bounden duty of the Holy Prophet and his companions to alleviate the sufferings of the widows and the orphans who had been deprived of their husbands and fathers. Muhammad (peace be upon him) undertook the major burden on himself and married Hafsa, daughter of Umar, whose husband had died in the battle of Badr. It was on this ground of clemency and compassion that the Holy Prophet married Zaynab, the daughter of Khuzaimah, who had been deprived of her husband in Uhud. Her parents were non-Muslims living in Mecca and after the martyrdom of her husband, there was none to take care of her. The next lady to enter the hospitable household of the Holy Prophet was Umm Salamah whose husband had received fatal injuries in the battle of Uhud and died leaving behind a pregnant widow and a daughter. The Prophet was moved by her pitiable condition and honoured her by taking her as his wife. The events relating to the marriage of Zaynab bint Jahsh have

been discussed in great detail in the foregoing pages and it has been established that this marriage was governed by some important social considerations, i.e. to obliterate the customs of adoptive affinity and also to remove the false notion then prevalent in society that the divorce of a noble lady by a freed slave undermined her prestige.

Besides these widows of his faithful followers, whom it fell to his lot to take under his protection and share their sufferings and sorrows, the Holy Prophet also took three widows of his enemies in marriage. The entry of these three ladies, Juwayriyah, Maymuna and Safiyyah (may Allah be pleased with them) in the house of the Holy Prophet, became the means whereby relations with various tribes were cemented and this is how hostilities came to an end.

It is quite evident that the marriages of the Holy Prophet were governed mainly by the feeling of compassion for the widows of his faithful followers, who had no means to fall back upon after they were bereft of the love and care of their husbands. This fact has been acknowledged even by the critics of the Prophet. "It would be remembered, however," says Bosworth Smith, "that most of Muhammad's marriages may be explained, at least, as much by his pity for the forlorn condition of the persons concerned, as by other motives."

Other marriages were contracted from the motives of policy, in order to conciliate the heads of rival factions.

Then there was also one more consideration, in no way less important than those discussed earlier, which led to these marriages. Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the bearer of God's message not only for men, but also for women. The womenfolk needed the prophetic guidance, training and instruction in the same way as the males. The Holy Prophet was fully cognizant of the need of Muslim society. He had, therefore, in the best interest of the Ummah, endeavored to create a new leadership amongst women, which, like its counterpart amongst men could, by precept and example, help the formation of a new type of womanhood representing the teachings of Islam. How could this objective be achieved without first preparing the most perfect specimen of Muslim womanhood. The Holy Prophet allowed some women, belonging to different social groups, having different tastes and tendencies and different intellectual standards to enter his household as his wives and then by his close personal contact, nurture and train their God-given faculties so perfectly in accordance with the teachings of Islam that they could serve as pillars of light not only for the womenfolk of the Islamic commonwealth, but for the whole of womankind. One or

two woman could not undertake this heavy responsibility. A whole group was required to meet this need.

Moreover, there is a good deal of difference in the nature of training essential for male and female. Man's life is dominated by social activities, whereas the natural sphere of woman's work is primarily her home. It is the wife alone who shares with the husband even the most secret affairs of life. The Holy Prophet could not prepare the specimen of Islamic womanhood unless he allowed some ladies to enter the innermost chambers of his domestic life. In view of the teachings of Islam, with regard to seclusion of sexes, only the noble wives of the Holy Prophet could be accommodated on this plane and mankind owes a deep debt of gratitude to these noble ladies that they communicated to us most faithfully, the sacred account of the Prophet's private life, which, like his public career, had so many facets and has been made a model pattern for the believers, both men and women. The injunction of the Qur'an: *'Verily in the Apostle of Allah, you have the best example'* (33:2) covers not only one aspect of his sacred life, but his whole life. It was with a view to achieving this objective, i.e., the authentic transmission of the Prophet's home life to the people that a few noble ladies were made to enter his house as his wives.

The Qur'anic verse: *'It is not allowed to take wives after this, nor to change them for others'* (33:52) implies that the Holy Prophet, like all his other acts, contacted those marriages perfectly in accordance with the will of the Lord. There was a divine purpose behind them and when it was achieved, a restriction was place upon him.

That the Prophet married these ladies as a religious necessity can well be judged from the fact that he spent his youth in the company of one wife, Khadijah only. At the age of forty he was commissioned as a Prophet, and during the first twelve years of his prophethood, when he had only to instil in the minds of the people the fundamentals of faith, i.e., Oneness of God, apostlehood of Muhammad, life after death, he did not feel the necessity of marrying any other lady. After the death of Khadijah, he married Sawda, a widow of advanced age. But with the migration to Medina when Islamic society was established, the Muslims were required to conform their social and personal behaviour to the teachings of Islam, revelations for practical guidance in all walks of life came from Allah. These had to be explained by the life example of the holy Prophet. There was not one problem, but numerous problems concerning all phases of life that needed solving at every step. How the holy Prophet solved them must be made known to the people

as it is also an integral part of the faith for *'he does not speak of his own desire'* (Qur'an 53:3) It is God who speaks through him in whatever he utters by way of spiritual guidance or practical legislation. Now, whatever the Holy Prophet said or did in public could easily be conveyed to the other people for their guidance. But what about his private life which was equally important and divinely inspired and had to serve as an example for the Believers? It is through the noble wives of the holy Prophet that the Muslims learnt the teachings of Islam in their personal concerns. It was not an ordinary work, but an important task of vast magnitude which was admirably accomplished by these pious ladies. (Allah be pleased with them). How can these facts be justifiably ignored in the matter of Muhammad's marriages?

It is strange indeed that the western critics of Islam and of the holy Prophet in their sordid endeavors to malign Muhammad (peace be upon him) close their eyes to all those illuminating facts which prove that his was a life of perfect sublimity and single-minded devotion to Allah, absolutely free from the taint of base desires. It is narrated on the authority of Jabir b. 'Abd Allah that Abu Jahl and some of the chiefs of the Quraysh approached the holy Prophet and said:

"If you are anxious for leadership, we are prepared to declare you our leader, if you need riches, we would collect for you an enormous amount of wealth that will suffice not only for you but even for your descendants; if you are impelled by sexual urge, you may choose ten beautiful damsels out of the whole tribe of Quraysh. The holy Prophet kept silent and did not utter a word. When their talks concluded, the holy Prophet recited the following verse of the Qur'an:

Ha Mim! A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful; A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an for people who know and the bearer of glad tidings and a warner: Yet most of them turn aside so that they hearken not. [Qur'an 41:4-4]

The holy Prophet recited these verses of the Qur'an and concluded them with the following verse:

Then if they still turn away, say thou: I warn you of calamity of the 'Ad and Thamud. [Qur'an 51: 13]

Even this single event is enough to prove Muhammad's immense love for Allah, his devotion to his sacred mission and the insignificance in his eyes the worldly pleasures. Allurement could not distract him, even for a moment, from the noble cause for which he stood and suffered all kinds of hardships and privations. No opportunity could be more attractive than that this

offered by the chiefs of Quraysh for the satisfaction of sensuous pleasures, if he were so inclined."

Appendix B

Excerpted from: *'Introduction to Islam'* by Dr. M. Hamidullah

402. It is true that Islam permits polygamy, but on this point Muslim law is more elastic and more in harmony with the requirements of society than the other systems of law which do not permit polygamy in any case. Supposing there is a case in which a woman has young children, and falls chronically ill, becoming incapable of doing the household work. The husband has no means of employing a maid-servant for the purpose, not to speak of the natural requirements of conjugal life. Supposing also that the sick woman gives her consent to her husband to take a second wife, and that a woman is found who agrees to marry the individual in question. Western law would rather permit immorality than a legal marriage to bring happiness to this afflicted home.

403. In fact, Muslim law is nearer to reason. For, it admits polygamy when a woman herself consents to such a kind of life. The law does not impose polygamy, but only permits it in certain cases. We have just remarked that it depends solely on the agreement of the woman. This is true of the first wife as well as the second one in prospect. It goes without saying that the second woman may refuse to marry a man who has already one wife; we have seen that no one can force a woman to enter into a marriage tie without her own consent. If the woman agrees to be a "co-wife" it is not the law which should be considered as cruel and unjust with regard to women and as favouring only men. As to the first wife, the act of polygamy depends on her. For, at the time of her marriage, she may demand the acceptance and insertion, in the document of the nuptial contract, or the clause that her husband would practise monogamy. Such a condition is as valid as any other condition of a legal contract. If a woman does not want to utilize this right of hers, it is not legislation which would oblige her to do that. We have just spoken of exceptional cases; and the law must have possible remedies. Polygamy is not the rule, but an exception; and this exception has multifarious advantages, social as well as other - the details would be burdensome here - and Islamic law need not be shy of this elasticity.

404. In the religious law of antiquity, there is no restriction to the number of wives a man may have. All

the Biblical prophets were polygamous. Even in Christianity which has become synonymous with monogamy, Jesus Christ himself never uttered a word against polygamy; on the other hand, there are eminent Christian theologians, like Luther, Malanchthon, Bucer, etc., who would not hesitate to deduce the legality of polygamy from the parable of the virgins spoken of in the Gospel of Matthew (25:1-12) for Jesus Christ envisages there the possibility of the marriage of one man with as many as ten girls simultaneously. If the Christians do not want to profit by the permissions (which the founder of their religions seems to have given them), the law is not changed for all that. This is true of the Muslims also, whose law is moreover the only one in history which expressly limits the maximum permissible number of polygamous wives. (For Christian theory and practice, as well as for general discussion, cf. also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under the articles, *Marriage*, and *Polygamy*; Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, 3 Vols.) ***

In a delightful report about how Imam Abu Hanifah received his name, an account of why the wife is forbidden to take more than one husband is recounted. 'Abu Hanifah' is an unusual name because it means 'the father of *Hanifah*', and Hanifah was his daughter. It was not the custom in those days to do this. Normally, the name would be 'the father of *the name of a son*.' How this came about is quite edifying. One day the great Imam Abu Hanifah was asked a question that, for the first time in his illustrious career, he was unable to answer. The question was, "*Why were women forbidden to marry more than one husband at a time?*" To make a long story short, Abu Hanifah's daughter said that she knew the answer and would solve this question if her father would make a promise to her that if she succeeded in solving this problem, he would then assure her a place in history. Abu Hanifah agreed. So she gathered a group of women together and gave each of them a cup. Then she brought in a large bowl of milk and asked each of them to dip their cups in the milk and to fill their cups. They did so. She then asked them to pour back the milk into the bowl. They did this too. She then asked them to re-fill their cups taking back only their own milk that they had poured into the bowl. This, obviously, was impossible to do. Hanifah had clearly demonstrated the kind of predicament that would be created if a woman had several husbands. With more than one husband, if she were to become pregnant, she would have exceptional difficulties determining who the actual father was. Identifying parentage and lineage would then be insurmountable for the offspring. Imam Abu Hanifah was so pleased with her answer that he took the name

'Abu Hanifah', 'the father of Hanifah', so his daughter did indeed earn a place in history.

Appendix C

This is a grammatically **edited** excerpt from the chapter '*Adab an-Nikah*' from Imam Ghazzali's '*Thya Ulum-id-din*' translated by Fazlul-Karim. Also blended with this translation is an excerpt from '*The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam*' and this is a translation of the same chapter by Muhtar Holland.

Benefits of marriage

There are five benefits: (1) to beget children, (2) to control sexual urges, (3) to obtain peace of mind, (4) to increase divine service, and (5) to gain rewards for duties to family. [Item (4) and (5) are not dealt with in this Appendix.]

(1) **To beget children.** This is the main purpose for marriage. The aim is to engender and preserve the human race. Four objectives are accomplished through procreation: - (i) to increase mankind (ii) Islam is propagated by increasing the number of followers of the Prophet, p.b.u.h. (iii) parents will hope to leave behind children who will pray for them (iv) and if a child dies before the parents, the prayers of the child in Paradise will be very beneficial for the parents.

The first objective is very subtle and not easily comprehended by man. It is a natural truth and the following is its proof. Take for example a landowner who has generously given a servant a large amount of seed and the tools for cultivation, and who has also given this servant land for cultivation. Now if the servant refuses to till this land and instead allows it to remain uncultivated, useless and dormant, and furthermore, if he also carelessly destroys the seeds, it is clear then that this servant will become an object of wrath by the landowner. Similarly God has created man and woman with the wherewithal to produce and raise children. The uterus is the fertile field and both the male and female organs are the tools for cultivation. He also created sexual passion in both the male and female for the bearing of children through the use of these organs. This is proof of God's design. The Prophet has clearly substantiated this when he said "Marry and keep a family". He who does not marry, destroys these seeds and allows these tools to lie useless and dormant and he thereby goes against God's wishes. Infanticide has also been prohibited by God for this reason.

From Muhtar Holland's Translation: [Pages 17 & 18]

If the sole motive for marriage were to ward off lust, the plague-stricken Mu'adh would hardly have cried: "Find me a wife, lest I meet Allah as a celibate!" You might perhaps object: "Surely Mu'adh had no expectation of children at that moment, so how do you explain his desire for marriage?" but to this I would reply as follows: The child is produced by sexual intercourse. Intercourse is brought about by the prompting of sexual appetite, which is an involuntary impulse. The only voluntary contribution a man can make is to procure the stimulus to sexual desire, and this can normally be anticipated. One who has contracted a marriage has therefore performed his duty and done what he had to do; the rest is beyond his own volition.

That is why marriage is recommended even for the impotent, for the stirring of desire is hidden and not susceptible to observation. Indeed, the recommendation to marry extends even to the totally castrated person who can never expect children, in much the same way as a bald man is recommended to pass the razor across his pate as others do (on Pilgrimage), following the example of the righteous ancestors. In the same vein, the practices known as *ramal* and *idtiba* are still recommended during the Pilgrimage. The original purpose of these was to demonstrate stamina in the face of the unbelievers, the imitation of this display of fortitude became the model conduct for later generations.

Such are the considerations in forming their severe disapproval of abstinence from marriage, even in cases where sexual appetite is enfeebled. [end of Muhtar Holland's translation]

(2) The second benefit of marriage

The second benefit of marriage is to be safe from the machinations of the devil and to satisfy lust and hence protect the private parts. The Prophet said: "If a man marries, half of his religion is saved. Fear God for the remaining half." The Prophet said: "Whoever among you is able to marry, should marry, and whoever is not able to marry, is recommended to fast, for fasting diminishes his sexual power." The pleasure which lies within sexual intercourse is an example of happiness in the afterlife. There is no benefit derived from a thing in which there is no pleasure.

(3) The third benefit of marriage

Marriage brings peace of mind as love grows between the couple. Peace of mind is necessary for divine

service. God says: *"It is He Who has created you from a single person, and He has created from him his wife, in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her."* Hazrat Ali said: "Give peace to the mind because it becomes blind when it becomes disturbed." There is a Hadith which says that there are three special times for a wise man: - he speaks secretly with his Lord at one time, he takes account of his actions at another time, and he occupies himself with food and drink at another time. In another narration, a wise man is not desirous except in three matters: to earn his livelihood for the next world, to earn his livelihood for this world, and to taste the pleasure of lawful things. The Prophet said: "There is effort in every action and there is struggle in every effort. He who adopts struggle goes towards my *Sunnah* and guidance. The Prophet said: Upon complaint to Gabriel about the lessening of my sexual passion, he advised me to take *Harisah*. The Prophet said: Three things are dear to me among earthly matters - perfume, woman and prayer, the latter is coolness to my eyes. This comfort is necessary for peace of mind.

From Muhtar Holland's translation: [Pages 20-22 . . . Conclusion]

He who obeys his master out of the desire to please Him is not the same as one who obeys merely in quest of deliverance from the perils of this agency.

Passion and procreation are both divinely ordained, and there is a link between the two. It would be wrong to say that the purpose is pleasure and the child is a necessary by-product (as, for instance, relieving oneself is a necessary consequence of eating, but not an end in itself.) No, the begetting of children is the aim of nature and the divine Wisdom, while sexual appetite is merely an incentive thereto.

By my life, there is in sexual appetite yet another dispensation, apart from the impetus to procreate, namely the joy experienced in satisfying it. If only that delight were lasting, it would be unparalleled by any other joy. It gives a foretaste of the delights we are promised in Paradise, for the prospect of a bliss we had never tasted would fail to impress. The prospect of sexual intercourse would hardly stimulate the impotent, nor would the pleasures of kingship and dominion serve to excite the interest of the very young. One advantage of worldly pleasures is that the hope of enjoying them permanently in Paradise can act as a spur to the worship of Allah.

Consider this Wisdom, this Mercy, this divine Providence! See how two lives derive benefit through this one appetite: an outer life and an inner life. The outer life is the life a man leads through the continuance

of his line, which constitutes a kind of survival, while the inner life is the Otherworldly life. The bliss [of sexual satisfaction], deficient because it is so ephemeral, thus stimulates a desire for perfect bliss, for bliss everlasting, and serves as an incentive to the worship which lead to its attainment. Desiring this so ardently, the creature finds it easier to persevere in the course that will bring him to such felicity in Paradise.

Relaxation and recreation for the soul [pg. 27 Muhtar Holland's Translation]

This [third benefit of marriage] is obtained by enjoying the company and sight of one's wife, and by shared amusement, whereby the heart is refreshed and strengthened in worship; for the lower self (*nafs*) is prone to boredom and inclined to shun duty as something unnatural to it. If constrained to persevere in something repugnant, it jibes and backs away, whereas if revived occasionally by pleasures it acquires new strength and vigor. In familiarity with women, one finds the relaxation to banish cares and to refresh the heart.

The souls of the pious need legitimate recreation, which is why the Exalted One said:

"That he may rest with her." [Qur'an 7:189]

[end of Muhtar Holland's translation]

Sexual etiquette in marriage

At the beginning of sexual intercourse, pronounce the name of God by reciting "Bismillah" and recite the *Takbir* and *Tahlil* after Chapter Ikhlas and say 'O God, if Thou takest out semen from my back, make it a good issue.' The Prophet said: 'In the name of Allah. O Allah! Protect us from Satan and also protect what you bestow upon us (i.e. the coming offspring) from Satan, and if it is destined that they should have a child then, Satan will never be able to harm that offspring.' The result is that the devil will not be able to injure a child that is born from this intercourse.

Don't face the Ka'bah at the time of intercourse and cover your body and the body of your wife. The Prophet used to cover his head, close his mouth and say to his wife, 'Take peace.' There is a Hadith which says: When anyone of you comes to his wife, let him not fall suddenly upon her, but let him speak words of love to her and then kiss each other. The Prophet said: Let none of you fall suddenly upon his wife like a lower animal. Let him send the Envoy before cohabitation. Someone asked 'What is the Envoy O Prophet?' He said, 'kisses and words of love.' The Prophet said: In three matters, the weakness of a male is disclosed. Firstly if a lover meets his beloved, and then they separate without enquiring into their mutual condition and health;

secondly, rejecting the honour which someone wishes to pay him [i.e., by rejecting a gift which was offered]; thirdly to engage in sexual intercourse with the wife or the female who is legally permitted, without talking to her or kissing her or by being unable to restrain the ejaculation of semen before that of his wife.

It is not commendable to cohabit with the wife on the first, middle and last days of the lunar month. It is commendable to cohabit on a Friday evening. After ejaculation, the husband should let his body lay some time upon his wife until she climaxes, as she is slower to climax. It is painful for her to be separated from her husband once her sexual passion has been aroused.

A young husband should enjoy sexual intercourse with his wife once every four days. To preserve the character of the wife, this may be increased or decreased. Sexual intercourse with the wife at the time of her menstruation is unlawful. However, it is lawful to enjoy her without sexual intercourse e.g. enjoy the region beneath the petticoat, or if there be such a need, even use the wife's hand for his ejaculation and stop short of actual copulation [in Arabic terminology, this is known as *jima' bil yad*, which means 'intercourse by hand.']. God says: "Your wives are a tilth unto you; so go to your tilth when and how you will." A man may keep company with his wife during her menstrual period for eating, resting/sleeping [without copulation] or other purposes. He is not obliged to avoid her.

Appendix D

An excerpt from "*Introduction to Islam*" by Dr. M. Hamidullah

108. Speaking of a strictly temporal act, such as a tax or a war, one pays taxes to the government. It should not be astonishing that Islam considers this act as one of the five basic elements of Faith, as important as belief, worship, fasting and pilgrimage! The significance is deep: One unites the spiritual and the temporal in a single whole, and one pays the tax not as a corvee or even as a social duty, but solely for the sake of God. When this duty of paying taxes becomes fixed in the mind as something sacred, a duty unto God from Whom nothing can be concealed and Who is, moreover, capable of resuscitating us and demanding our account, one can easily understand with what care and scruple a believer will pay his dues in the performance of this obligation. Similarly, war is forbidden in Islam except in the way of God; and it is not difficult to understand that such a soldier is more apt to be humane and will not seek any earthly gain in the course of risking his life. By

spiritualizing the temporal duties, Islam has had no other motives but strengthening the spiritual side of man, who in, this manner, far from seeking the material advantage of the material thing, aspires thereby to obtain only the pleasure of God. The Prophet has said: Ostentation is a sort of polytheism (*shirk*); and the reason as explained by Al-Ghazzali, is the following: if somebody worships or fasts for ostentation, it is *shirk* (polytheism), a worship of one's self, not of God Almighty; on the contrary, if one even cohabits with one's own wife - not for the carnal pleasure, but for performing the duty imposed by God, then that is an act of piety and devotion, meriting the pleasure of and reward from God, as the Prophet has observed (cf. Ibn Hanbal, V, 154, 167, 187, etc.)

Endnotes

1. **p.b.u.h.** is the short form for "peace be upon him" which is an expression used by Muslims to indicate reverence towards the holy Prophet Muhammad.
2. The tomb of the Prophet Zakariya *alaihi-salam* (may Allah be pleased with him), is located in the great Omayyad Mosque in Aleppo which is a city in northern Syria.. [Click here](#) to see a picture of this mosque.
3. From "*The Sayings of Muhammad*" by Allama Sir Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, pg 41. Charles E. Tuttle Company, Boston 1992.
4. *Ibid*, pg. 42
5. '*The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam*' (Chapter *Adab-an-Nikah*) from Book 12 of *Ihya'ulum ad-din* by Imam al-Ghazzali. This is an English translation from the original Arabic by Muhtar Holland and published by Al-Baz Publishing Inc.