

Sexual behavior from a religious perspective

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Abstract

It is extremely important to study sexual behavior as a fundamental human behavior especially after marriage. The sexual identity is formed when an infant is 2-3 years old. This identification is pivotal to the survival of human species. Also, it plays a very important role in the tranquility of life. Therefore, it is needed to the moment of death. Sexual behavior is largely influenced by education and training. Therefore, sexual education is of prime importance. The present paper tries to study appropriate sexual behavior from the perspective of Islamic teachings. We shall explain why sexual training is necessary, how it should be carried out, and what its limits are. We shall proceed to the discussion of premarital sexual activity, and the significance of introducing the framework of sexual training based on Islamic teachings. We will, then, emphasize the necessity of education about sex for youngsters who are coming of age. We will also mention the techniques for preventing and treating sexual disorders and deviations citing important common cases. Finally, we will discuss appropriate sexual activity and its importance in matrimonial relationship including the etiquettes of sexual intercourse, proper sexual behavior, and the ways to establish satisfactory sexual relationship.

Keywords: sexual instinct, sexual education, matrimonial relationship, sexual behavior, sexual coming of age, sexual deviations

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Introduction

Sexual instinct is among very important human natural instincts responsible for the survival of human species. Historically speaking, human beings have been attracted to the opposite sex in order to make reproduction possible through sexual intercourse. Sexual instinct emerges normally in the form of attraction to the opposite sex usually when children come of age. This instinct comprises inbuilt psychological, mental, and physical desire pushing the individual to a certain direction leading to sexual behavior.

In different cultures, from different viewpoints, the concept of sexual instinct is understood differently. In old ages, human understanding of sexuality was confined to what people could get from religion and literature. They benefited from the sexual tendencies in the framework of the awareness they gained from these sources. Ancient Greek fairy tales contain the notion that human beings are of dual creation; some human beings are dual female and some are dual male. Attraction towards the opposite sex is a result of the gap due to this duality. Homosexual tendencies result from dual male-female divide (Hyde, 1986: 4).

In Judaism, sexuality is considered more as an issue pertinent to reproduction and having an heir. The boys are advised to marry when they are 13-18 years old. Girls are so advised when they are 12 years old (Lindsay and Thompson 1988: 421). In this religion, female sexual activity is considered sinful and filthy on the one hand, and it is advised, on the other hand, that satisfaction of sexual desires should be done exclusively through marriage and within family where a woman is protected. Obviously, this attitude to sexuality contains paradoxical elements.

In Christianity, there is no uniform coherent approach to sexuality. On the one hand, women are also invited to monasticism. At the same time, they are considered beguiling forces sparking sexual desire in men, which should be suppressed by resort to the church.

By the advent of Islam, human approach to sexuality and to woman was altered. Islam recognized sexuality and attached much value to marriage inviting human beings to satisfaction of their sexual tendencies in a well-planned pattern rather than suppressing them. Islam permitted temporary marriage under certain circumstances in addition to permanent marriage which is the archetype kernel of family. Consequently, the only lawful way for expressing and satisfying sexual desire is through marriage from Islam's

point of view. People who are not capable of marriage are ordered to observe chastity. The Quran asserts, "And those who are not capable of marriage ought to observe self-restraint and chastity until God enriches them out of His generosity" (Sura Nur, verse 33). Chastity involves controlling sexual desire. People not capable of marriage, whether because of economic shortcomings or psychological and mental immaturity should control their sexual desires via methods which will be explained later.

The signification of sexual behavior

Biology, psychology, and anthropology are three scientific disciplines that have given definitions for sexual behavior. But the definitions are different. According to biologists, sexual behavior means any activity that increases the likelihood of the sperm impregnating a female egg (Hyde, 1986: 3). In this definition, the function of reproduction is emphasized. This definition was introduced to scientific circle when Anton Van Leeuwenhoek and his colleague, John Ham, explored sperm for the first time. In 1875, the first artificial impregnation was cut out by Oscar Hurling. Even before the egg was directly seen in human ovulation in the 19th century, biologists had already begun to explain sexual activity in terms of impregnation and reproduction. Psychologists, however, define sexual behavior as every activity that produces sexual arousal increasing the likelihood of attaining orgasm. Studies carried out by anthropologists and experts in social psychology indicate that different cultures prescribe different methods for satisfying sexual desire. Hence, sexual behavior is realized in different forms in different cultures.

Along the progress of behavioral sciences, the study of human sexual behavior has become necessary. Among important researches in this field, we can mention the reports Kinsey published in 1953 about human sexual behavior. He interviewed 5300 men and 5900 women. Much valuable information was gathered and a very important criterion was set. He came to conclude that the best indicator of an individual's vision and attitude is his apparent behavior (Bancroft, 1983: 108). He carried out his research about women's attitude and compassionate reactions against the background of this presupposition.

Hunt conducted a research in 24 states in the United States of America. 982 men and 1044 women participated. 90% of these participants were white and 10% were black. 75% were married, 25% were bachelors, and 4% were divorcees who had been married long before. This research indicated that the cases of sexual

intercourse before marriage were on increase in the United States showing that the US society was heading towards more liberal sexual behavior in the future.

Fundamental concepts in sexual behavior

Studying sexual behavior, we face several fundamental concepts we need to define exactly. They are as follows:

1. Sex or sexual tendency

Two different uses of this concept must be discerned. Sometimes, the term sex is used to mean sexual activity accompanied by pleasure and, sometimes, the ensuing reproduction. In another use of the term, it refers to the biological dichotomy of male-female. Female chromosomes and sex organs play crucial role in determining one's female sex. Likewise, male chromosomes and sexual organ are very important in determining one's male sex. But femininity and masculinity are characteristics beyond biological features (Lindsay and Thompson, 1988: 417).

2. Sexual identity

This concept refers to one's vision of oneself; whether the person considers herself/himself a woman or a man. It is based on the biological structure of the body. But also it depends on personal and sociological experiences. The continuation of feeling manhood and or womanhood particularly depends on the personal experiences of the society's response to them.

Usually at the age of 2-3, every child can decisively say "I am a boy" or "I am a girl." According to Robert Stuller, the concept *sexual identity* implies the mental aspect of masculinity and femininity while the concept *sex* refers to the social and biological dimensions of sexual identity. These two concepts often co-refer. Usually, men display masculinity and women femininity. But they seldom diverge; some women may behave as males and some men as females (Kaplan, 1968, P. 80).

Among the elements determining sexual identity, the biological, the genetic, and the cultural including parents' attitudes are very important. The education a person receives either in family or in society plays a crucial role in founding their personality.

3. Sex role

By sex role, we mean cultural expectation as to how men and women

behave towards one another determining the activities of an individual on the basis of his values and interests (Lindsay & Thompson 1988: 418).

Sex role is in close connection to sexual identity. The education a person receives plays the decisive role in acquiring appropriate sex role. Sometimes, sex role is inconsistent with sexual identity. One may identify oneself with a person of the same sex but opt for the clothing, hairstyle, or other features exclusively peculiar to the opposite sex. Also, it is possible that a person identifies themselves with a person of the opposite sex but chooses behavioral features of a person of the same sex as situations require.

John Money defines sex role as whatever a person does in order to be identified as a male or a female meeting what society demands of them. Sex role is determined gradually via one's experiences gained through interaction with the environment including the orders and inculcation they receive (Kaplan, 1368: 14).

Sexual education and training

1. Sexual behavior founded on sexual training

The sexual training and education is needed in all the different stages of human development in order to prevent sexual and moral deviations. The majority of deviations observed in youngsters have their roots in improper sexual education and training. Criminologists hold that a greater percentage of crimes committed by people younger than 29 years of age are either directly or indirectly related to sex. Many cases of robbery by young people have sex incentives in the background (Keynia, 1362, introduction).

Because of the importance of sexual training, there are so many religious precepts concerning the protection of children and adolescents from pitfalls, dangers, and repercussions of sexual tendencies. We shall mention some of them here.

Religions have advised that measures ought to be taken to strengthen the religious and moral values children and adolescents must have. They should be taught how to protect themselves and defend their human dignity, how to be polite in socializing with people, and how to be sensitive to their religious duties and obligations. The time and way of resting and sleeping should be administered. Boys and girls should sleep separately. When they go to relieve themselves, they should be watched. Their way of clothing should be

controlled. Elementary education about coming of age should be given to them. The physical and mental changes that accompany their becoming sexually mature should be carefully handled. They should be warned and alarmed about the dangers that may threaten them. Their conducts and contacts should be indirectly controlled.

Parents should pay attention to the fact that children understand different things in proportion to their age. Therefore, they should be careful about their matrimonial relationship in the presence of the children. Jokes, metaphors, and hints parents exchange while children can see and hear them may influence how children's personality is formed. Children and adolescents are very curious about sexual relation. They focus their attention on their parents' behavior. They spy on them. Boys and girls around the age 6-7 and adolescents around the age 13-14 are aware of their role as potential fathers and mothers though ignorant about details. Sometimes, they display the imitation of the matrimonial relationship of their parents. Therefore, it is necessary that parents gradually inform them about sexual issues teaching them what is good and what is bad.

2. The borderline of sexual training

Sexual training during childhood and adolescence prepares people for necessary sexual education before marriage. Needless to say, the quality of education and sexual training differs in different stages; before marriage, during married life, and after marriage.

According to Elderman's report, among every 20 adolescents in the United States of America, 50% are sexually active, 25% use anti pregnancy drugs, 10% become pregnant, and 5% beget a child. Another study conducted by Johns Hopkins revealed that one out of every five 15-year-old adolescents, one out of every three 16-year-old adolescents, and 40% of all 17-year-old adolescents are sexually active. Louis Harris Paul reports that 57% of the population of 17-year-old adolescents, 46% of the population of 16 year old adolescents, and 29% of 15 year old adolescents are sexually active, and 80% of the girls who enter university have experienced sexual relationship at least once (Shahid Athar, 1990:7).

The aforementioned studies show how important premarital sexual education and training is. Although these studies have all been conducted in the United States of America, the results need not be confined to the American society. At least, similar problems may erupt in other societies in different degrees

though. Consequently, it is necessary to plan for relevant education and training for youngsters and adolescents keeping in mind that the content should fit the age and needs of the trainees. A course of sexual training may include the following topics:

1. premarital sexual education
 - a) sexual development and evolution
 - i. the time pattern of adolescence
 - ii. physical changes in adolescence
 - iii. need to family life
 - b) the physiology of reproduction system
 - i. sex organs, sexual disorders, and menstruation in girls
 - ii. sex organs, sexual disorders, and wet dreams in boys
 - c) concepts pertinent to fetus, its growth, and birth
 - d) venereal diseases
 - e) social, mental, and emotional facets of the life of youngsters and adolescents
 - f) social, moral, and religious aspects of the life of the youth and the aged
2. sexual education at the time of marriage
3. sexual education during married life

Premarital sexual education

Parents, teachers, and the mass media should undertake the essential sexual education of the youngsters and the adolescents. One propose of this education is to prevent premature puberty. Sexual maturity should not precede mental maturity. Those who undertake this education should be well versed and experienced. Appropriate time and place of education and the clarity of the subject of education are needed. The content of education should fit the requirements of the trainee bearing in mind their age. Parents and teachers are the examples children and adolescents follow. They should, therefore, be careful about behaviors that attract the attention of children and adolescents to sexual issues causing premature puberty. For example, attention must be paid to the way mothers wear clothes or makeup, the way they change clothes, and the question of lawful and unlawful contact of two persons.

1. The evolution of sexual desire

From an Islamic perspective, it is necessary to pay attention to the evolution

of sexual desire in premarital education. According to the Quran and hadiths, the process of the evolution of sexual instinct includes three stages:

From birth to age 6

In Quranic terminology, a newborn is called infant until he or she comes of age. “And when your infants reach puberty [i.e. come of age], they should no more enter the parents’ room without permission” (Sura Nur, verse 59). In some hadiths, the Arabic word *Sabi* is used. It refers to an infant as long as she or he is kept in cradle. The Quran speaks about Jesus Christ as a *Sabi*: “They said how you can talk to an infant who is still in cradle” (Sura Maryam, verse 29).

We can conclude that the two words *tifl* and *sabi* refer to the period between birth and puberty. So, we can divide this period into two parts: from birth to age 6 and from age 6 to puberty.

From the advice given by the holy Prophet of Islam and the Immaculate Imams (be peace upon them) on sexual education of children, we can gather that even in the early days of childhood, sexual tendencies exist though children are not aware of them. External factors can unconsciously affect them. About the necessity of parents’ sexual activity being so that children cannot notice, the holy Prophet of Islam says “I swear to God in whose hand is my life that if a child is alive seeing a couple having intercourse or hearing their voices or breathing, he or she will become a fornicator and will never be saved” (Horr Ameli, 1403 Lunar Hegira, Vol. 14, section 67, hadith 1). Imam Baqir (be peace upon Him) also says, “Never have sex where a child, who can describe what he sees for other people, can see you” (ibid).

From these hadiths, we can gather that children imitate their parents’ behavior and locution. They often identify themselves with their parents. Sometimes, they play with their sexual organs trying to understand their sex and their differences from the opposite sex. They gradually form their picture of themselves and begin to play their role as a person.

From age 6 to puberty

At this stage, boys and girls completely understand their sex role, and realize what society expects of them and are ready to comply with that demand.

At this stage, it is very important to prevent premature puberty in order to avoid the gap between sexual maturity and mental maturity. To do so, it is important to understand the factors causing premature puberty. Among these factors, the following are prominent:

1. Genetic and heritable factors are beyond individual’s control. Allameh

Tabatabaee explains the term *Shakilah* used in the Quran in terms of genetic factors responsible for passing certain characteristics from parents to children. The Quran says, "Say that every person behaves in the manner his dispositional structure demands." Tabatabaee writes, "Dispositional structure includes genetic and environmental characteristics as well as personal traits that push people to behave a certain way. People are different in regard to their predispositions. Some people develop tendency to the opposite sex faster than some others do" (Tabatabaee, 1397 lunar Hegira, vol. 13, page 203);

2. The pattern of nutrition plays a very important role here. Foods enriched with hormones and consuming large quantities of meat, eggs, and the like are very effective;
3. Social and cultural factors such as watching movies and pictures containing sexual scenes, listening to or reading sex stories, the exchange of photos, expressions, jokes, and satires with sex tinges contribute to premature puberty;
4. Close contacts between boys and girls, unnecessary and too much blandishment, and other sorts of physical association of opposite sexes;
5. Problems and diseases that make the skin around sexual organs sensitive and cause inflammation such as eczema or gastric parasites and even tight clothes.

Because of these factors, it is very important that parents and trainers instruct adolescents and youngsters about how to dress, how to eat, how to sleep, how to wake up, how to take a shower, how to socialize with people, and what to watch and listen to and read.

Islamic precepts in regard to sexual behavior include advises that guarantee the natural growth of sexual tendencies preventing disorders and premature puberty. Some of these pieces of advice are as follows:

1. Religious ban on kissing boys and girls aged more than six years. Imam Ali (be peace upon Him) says, "As a girl becomes six years old, no man should kiss or embrace her except *maharim*,"¹ (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 28).
2. Religious ban on boys kissing girls and vice versa from the age 6 upward

1. The word *maharim* is the plural form of the word *mahram*. According to Islamic Sharia, close contact such as touching and seeing any part of the naked body of a person by a person of the opposite sex is not permitted except for a set of kinfolk such as parents, siblings, aunts, uncles etc. These are called *maharim*.

except for *maharim*. The holy Prophet of Islam says, “Boys aged seven years or more and girls aged six years or more should not kiss one another” (ibid.).

3. Boys’ beds and those of girls’ should be separated. Adolescents of the same sex should also sleep in different beds. Children’s beds should be separated from their parents’ from the age five or six. The holy Prophet of Islam says, “Separate the beds of children; boys from boys, girls from girls, and boys from girls from the age 10 onward,” (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 28).
4. The holy Quran pays special attention to the phenomenon of puberty. Addressing the faithful, The Quran says, “O you believers, your children who have not yet come of age and your female slaves should ask your permission [to enter your rooms] three times a day; before dawn prayers, at noon when you take off your clothes, and after night prayers; the three times when you undress,” (Sura Nur, verse 58). This verse and the two sayings quoted before tell us that probable improper sexual stimulation should be prevented. If children are allowed to enter the parents’ rooms without permission, they may behold the parents having sex. This leaves adverse effect on them. So, parents must hide their sex affairs from children. By extension, we can infer that stimulating factors, aggravating factors and destructive factors must be controlled in the first place.

Puberty

In his book about the stages of training, Maurice Denis says about puberty, “Sexual life is demonstrated in various behaviors of adolescents. If this aspect is separated from other aspects, certain problems may follow; obsessive ideas and fears peculiar to the period of puberty. Even children demonstrate some sort of sexual activity which is not related to sex organs. To ignore these activities endangers the child’s health,” (Dennis 1362, p. 162).

The parents and trainers of adolescents should not skip the following tasks: 1) informing adolescents about the changes they are going to experience in advance; 2) preventing sexual deviations and taking necessary measures immediately to treat them if they happen to appear; 3) Warning adolescents about any haste in sexual activity. Especially in the case of girls, parents are responsible to give them information about menstruation in advance. Otherwise, they may be shocked or ashamed the first time they experience it.

Girls' puberty

The process of puberty in girls usually accompanies the following visible physical changes: fast enlargement of the breasts, the growth of pubic hair, maximum physical growth of the body, the beginning of menstruation. Menstruation usually starts from 10 to 17. The average age is 13. Seldom has it started at the age of 9 or after 18. 75% of girls experience menstruation at the age of 12-14. Menstruation should not be taken as evidence for perfect puberty. Sometimes, after the first menstruation, the process stops and disorders appear. Sometimes, it starts before the ovary is sufficiently grown to produce fertile eggs or the womb is capable of pregnancy. Ford and Beach have proven that only a very limited number of girls can reproduce before the age 15. The likelihood of their pregnancy is far low compared to girls of other ages (The Authors' Group, 1998, p. 443).

Boys' puberty

The apparent physical changes in boys at puberty include fast and maximum growth of the testicles and penis, the growth of long and soft pubic hair, the growth of thick mustache, the growth of beard, and the change of the tone of the voice into more deepened and bass. The study carried out by an expert showed that 65% of boys pass the state of puberty between 14 and 15 (ibid).

Bancroft believes, "It is almost established that sexual responses increase in boys at puberty. Hormones are said to be responsible for these changes. In boys having experienced orgasm through masturbation, the only differences in the puberty is ejaculation and passionate response to sexual stimulation (Bancroft 1983: 21).

As we mentioned earlier, the main sign of coming of age in boys is wet dream and ejaculation and in girls menstruation. It is widely-accepted among Shiite jurists that two other signs of puberty are growth of pubic hair and reaching 16 lunar years of age for boys and 9 for girls. Some jurists like Feiz Kashani believe that girls come of age at 13. There are hadiths supporting this view. The majority of Sunni jurists hold that girls and boys come of age at 18.

It is worthwhile to add here that the age of puberty differs according to climate. Mauris says, "In different climates, the first menstruation of girls occurs at different ages. In tropical and warm regions, it starts earlier than in cold regions. In Ethiopia and in La pony, girls experience the first menstruation at the ages 9 and 18 respectively (Dubos, 1362:30).

According to the Quran, maturity is of two different kinds; sexual and rational. The former is called maturity for marriage and the latter is comprised of ability to discern good from bad and to administer social, economical, and personal affairs according to interest. "Assay the orphans until they reach puberty, then give them back their property after you make sure they are wise enough," (Sura Nessa: verse 6).

2. Controlling sexual desires

Sexual education before marriage includes teaching methods of controlling sexual desires. Here, we mention some of these methods.

- Fasting

The holy prophet of Islam says: "o young people, whoever among you able to marry should do so and those unable to marry should fast for, fasting controls sexual faculty" (Sabur Ordubadi, 1367, P. 108).

- Physical exercise

Physical exercises such as swimming and mountain climbing and the like are effective in giving man the power to observe and control sexual desires.

- Compliance with Sharia Law

There are certain religious obligations concerning the contact between persons of different sex that aim at enabling them to control their sexual drive. For example, women should refrain from talking to men in an arousing manner. They should communicate with the opposite sex in such a severe and tough tone that no tinge of attraction be caught. Imam Khomeini says that if communication between men and women is arousing it would be religiously prohibited (Imam Khomeini, 1360, p. 236). Unmarried girls and boys should not get together in private where third persons can have no access or presence. Imam Khomeini Also says: "if unmarried couples of different sex stay at a solitary place where nobody else is or can be present, they should depart immediately if they fear to be dragged to sin".

From what was said, we can infer that observing religious rules concerning the contact between the two sexes empower man to overcome and control the volcanic sexual drive. Self control of eyes, hears, imagination and thought via fasting, sport and observing religious rules are effective (Kajbaf, 1381, 106).

3. Sexual deviations

As we saw earlier, during puberty, sex identity is formed through attraction to the opposite sex leading to preparation for marriage. If sexual desires are

satisfied through marriage appropriately, mental and psychological health is guaranteed. Otherwise, mental or sexual disorders remain likely and sexual deviation probable. There are various methods for measuring deviated or abnormal sexual behavior. We shall mention some here.

Statistical methods enable us to define normal behavior by observing the behavior the majority of people in society approve of. Accordingly, any sexual behavior which is odd or queer in society is considered deviation (Hyde, 1986, p. 485). It is obvious that this criterion for deviation is trivial. There are some behaviors uncommon but healthy and, at the same time, so many other forms of common behaviors that are harmful. "Normal," in psychological and social terms, cannot be defined on the basis of frequency and scarcity.

The sociological method for defining deviation takes cultural element into account. Deviation is, from this point of view, any behavior that breaks or violates the laws of society. Cultural differences account for the varieties of deviation peculiar to certain societies. A particular sexual behavior may be considered a deviation in a society but normal in another.

Modern psychological approach gives a set of general rules by reference to which deviation can be discerned. Arnold Buss introduces three criteria for sexual deviation:

- Person exhibiting the behavior feels uneasy;
- The behavior falls short of satisfying the person;
- The behavior is queer;
- The behavior inflicts harm whether physical or mental on the person or on others.

He, then, elaborates on these criteria. Queerness differs from culture to culture. But the other criteria are not relative. Any behavior that accompanies all or some of these features is a deviation to that extent.

Kaplan and Saddocks hold that since human sexual behavior is too complex we cannot define natural sexual behavior. Therefore, we cannot give a precise definition for sexual deviation either. A particular sexual behavior that almost everybody rejects may still be natural in some circumstances. For example, "a sexual affair in which the partner is not one's spouse or is not the only party involved or in which sexual stimulation is not done only via sex organs or in which orgasm is not experienced can yet be normal and natural," (Kaplan & Saddocks, 1968, p. 11).

Abnormal sexual behavior is defined according to their view as "obsessive, exclusive, and destructive behaviors accompanied by anxiety or feeling guilty," (ibid).

From an Islamic perspective, sexual deviation consists of behaviors accompanied by anxiety and worry that are contrary to natural disposition. A number of examples of deviation are mentioned in Islamic sources:

- Fornication
- Gay tendency
- Lesbianism
- Incest
- Masturbation
- Sodomy with animals
- Pederasty
- Cuckolding
- Pimping
- Cross dressing, being a drag queen or drag king
- Nudity
- Ogling

Any of these examples brings about consequences in personal, social, and family life that may cause mental and psychological disorders. Reflection on sayings of the Infallible Imams and the Quranic verses can reveal some of these consequences.

Fornication

The Quran says, “Keep away from fornication for it is a grave sin and a wrong path,” (Sura Esra, verse 32). There are other verses in Suras *furqan*, *Nur*, and *Mumtahanah* some of which were revealed in Medina and some others in Mecca prohibiting fornication. Among the repercussions of fornication for men, we can mention a few. Psychologically speaking, fornication accompanies anxiety and fear on account of committing an unlawful act, the likelihood of disclosure in the future, and the fact that the male party of the affair feels it unfair that he's going to leave the other party unprotected in society after satisfying his desire for pleasure. In addition, there is the sense of guilt and the ensuing regret on what they have done in some cases. Maybe for the same reason, the illegal children, too, suffer from particular problems as a result of which “they tend to unlawful acts, they undermine religious rules, and are bad tempered” as Imam Sadeq (be peace upon Him) describes (Phalsafi, 1342: 145).

Another hadith from Imam Reza (be peace upon Him) explains why fornication is prohibited. “The reason why fornication is prohibited is that it brings about social and personal corruption, cuts the lineage necessary for

inheritance, family relationships, and parents' ties with children; the female fornicator does not know whose child she is raising; the illegal child does not know their father, and no trace of family ties can be kept."

The holy Prophet of Islam warns His followers about fornication and describes it thus: "Oh Muslims! Refrain from fornication for it contains six features three this worldly and three in the hereafter. The mundane features are: 1) it does away with the light of the eyes; 2) it brings about poverty; 3) it cuts one's life short. The consequences in the hereafter are: 1) it causes severe reckoning on the Day of Judgment; 2) it brings about divine anger; 3) it causes everlasting damnation in the hell."

The holy Prophet of Islam (be peace upon Him) is quoted as saying, "When a person commits fornication, he loses the spirit of faith." Explaining this hadith, Imam Baqir (be peace upon Him) says, "The spirit of faith mentioned in this hadith refers to the holy verse of the Quran where God says he supports the faithful through a spirit of His. This divine spirit departs when a person commits fornication" (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 235).

A social punishment inflicted on fornicators is that pious men and women must not marry fornicators: a male fornicator should not marry except a female fornicator or a polytheist and the female fornicator can only be married to a male fornicator or a polytheist; and the faithful should not commit fornication" (Sura Nur, verse three). Explaining the meaning of this verse of the Quran, Tabatabaee writes, "If a fornicator is disclosed and punished and refrains from repentance, then, no pious Muslim is permitted to marry them; only fornicators or polytheists may marry them" (Tabatabaee, 1397 lunar Hegira, p.80). There is a form of social punishment for fornicators in which they are disowned by the Muslim community. There are many other hadiths with similar content. Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) says, "Do not marry a man or woman who is known to be a fornicator unless you are sure they have repented," (Phaalsafi, 1348, p.151).

Homosexuality

Homosexual sex is a form of deviation. For it is contrary to human natural disposition. Male and female are so created that they can complement each other sexually counting the survival of human species. The Quran put the same idea in quite a different wording, "Women are like garments for you and you are like garments for them," (Sura Baqarah, verse 187). Members of the two sexes complement one another socially, ethically, religiously, and biologically.

Addressing the homosexuals of an extinct nation, the Quran reproaches, “You turn your back on your spouses whom God has created for you and turn to persons of the same sex? You are a group of aggressors,” (Sura Shu’ara, verse 166). Homosexual tendencies are counted as deviation from the natural disposition in this Quranic verse. Explaining the reason why homosexuality is reprehensible, Imam Reza (be peace upon Him) says, “It is because of the natural disposition of men and women and the repercussions of homosexuality including the endangering human survival, jeopardizing social life, social order, proper social management, and finally the destruction of the world,” (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 251).

Masturbation

Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) was asked about masturbation. He said, “It is a grave sin; God has banned it in the Quran and the person who commits masturbation can be said to have married himself. If I happen to know anybody who does so, I would not join him at one table.” Asked “where in the Quran did God prohibit masturbation,” the Imam answered, “The Quranic verse saying whosoever goes beyond [the limits set] is considered an aggressor, and masturbation is beyond the limit,” (Sura Moamenun, verse 7 and Maarej, verse 31).

Among the physical and mental repercussions of masturbation, we can mention the following:

1. Hyper stimulation of hypothalamus and the excessive activity of sexual glands resulting in premature puberty
2. Frequent discharge of physical and mental power resulting in general weak health and premature aging
3. The relative hypo blood flow in sensitive organs of the body such as brain as the result of hyper blood flow in sexual organs
4. Feeble will, capriciousness, memory dysfunction, and mental retardation as a result of frequent masturbation
5. Weak eyesight, loss of appetite, feeble bone structure, and even arthritis
6. Too much sensitivity to sexual issues preventing man from freethinking
7. Diminished sexual desire and premature ejaculation
8. Post marriage complexities and problems
10. Mental disorders such as frustration, melancholy, indifference to important and sensitive life affairs
11. Masochism or sadism (Sabur Ordubadi, 1988, p. 124).

Improper clothing

There are two cases of improper clothing; tendency to nudity and cross-dressing. As to nudity, from an Islamic perspective, men and women are to cover their body and hide their beauty from people of the opposite sex except *maharim*. The extent to which the body is to be covered is called *hijab*. Only married couples are permitted to undress for each other. Islam has also prohibited the display of women's beauty to non-*maharim*. But the style of clothing is also important. Neither sex is permitted to wear those clothes which are exclusively peculiar to the other sex. This rule aims at fortifying sex identity. When women use the clothes which society considers as exclusively men's, they show they are not aware of or content with their sexual identity. Imam Ali (be peace upon Him) says, "I heard the Prophet of God say, "Distanced from God's mercy are those men who dress like women do and those women who dress like men do." This indicates that, from an Islamic perspective, men and women are to observe social standards, traditions, and customs concerning clothing.

Ogling

As we said earlier, Islam orders faithful men and women to avoid ogling in order to prevent six deviations. Ogling a person other than one's spouse gradually causes sexual deviation. The Quran says, "O prophet, tell the faithful they should cast down their eyes and cover their private parts; this is better and closer to piety. God knows what they do. Tell faithful women they should cast down their eyes..." (Sura Nur, Verse 30).

Casting down one's eyes means that one must not keep watching a person who is not their *mahram* if they happen to see them. Imam Baqir (be peace upon Him) says, "The first glance is not a sin. But your second look is not to your interest. The third look will bring damnation upon you," (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 14).

About how people who refrain from prohibited look are rewarded, Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) says, "Whosoever happens to see a [non-*mahram*] woman but immediately closes his eyes or turns them to the sky would be awarded a *houri* in Paradise." It is advised in this hadith that one should control his looks by remembering God and doing something that distracts them from a sinful scene. Muslim jurists' famous fatwa is that people who are not *mahram* should not watch one another except in emergency such as when a doctor needs to examine a patient; a man is permitted to look at the face

and the hands of a woman not beyond the wrist, without sexual intention, only once; it is prohibited to repeat the act of looking.

Since other forms of sexual deviations are not very common, we skip discussing them here.

Sexual behavior in matrimonial relationship

How to establish proper matrimonial relationship

Mutual free selection of sexual partner in marriage

Satisfactory sexual behavior can be gained in matrimonial life only if the marriage partners have voluntarily selected each other as husband and wife. Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) says, “And marry the person whom you choose and forget about persons your parents choose for you,” (Phalsafi and 1973: 259). It is instrumental in achieving proper sexual satisfaction that the partners like each other. Matrimonial contentment is the pillar of family stability. Contentment gives way to love. Love induces mutual care.

Mutual respect

In order for the family to be strong and stable, healthy, and moderate sexual relationship between the marriage partners is needed. It can be achieved only if sincerity and mutual respect govern matrimonial relation. Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) says, “In every married couple, the husband should observe three things; sympathy towards his wife that brings about attachment and love, good temper and look that attracts his wife to him, and finally, financial support for his wife. He ought to be cheerful, passionate, and caring. The wife ought to be pious so that her spouse can have full trust in her, she should care for the husband for it brings about reciprocal care, and she should express her love and affection to him, appear in her most beautiful looks, and comply with his demands when they are alone together,” (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, sec. 6, hadith 2). The husband should consider his wife as gift of God so that he can treat her well as the Quran orders: “And you should treat them nicely,” (Sura Nisa, verse 19).

Negative shyness

A husband and wife should be close to one another as to communicate about whatever problems they may have including sexual problems in order to solve them. Sometimes, they need help by psychologists or counselors but they should understand that nobody is closer to anyone of them than their spouse. Avoiding raising questions and talking about problems is considered misplaced shyness.

Agreement about sex

Marriage partners must reach complete agreement about how to achieve sexual satisfaction. This would make every preparation necessary before sexual intercourse. Mutual understanding of one another and reciprocal care are very important in successful satisfaction.

Observing sexual morality

Successful sexual matrimonial relationship requires that each of the partners takes care of their behavior and words so as to avoid making the other feel contempt and humiliated. Otherwise, their mental disturbance directly affects their sexual activity. Sometimes, this leads to sexual dysfunction. Sometimes, sexual intercourse becomes impossible as the result. It may give rise to anger and wind up in violence. Marriage partners should always observe moral principles and control their negative emotions. In cases where they fail to reach sexual satisfaction, they should still remain loyal and behave morally.

The etiquette of sexual intercourse

Most of the instructions on sexual intercourse prescribed by Islam aim at creating a balance between the quality of life and the quantity of activities. In Islamic precepts, we see some pieces of advice addressed to married couples. For example, it is advised that spouses avoid any haste in sexual intercourse. They are advised to attend to preparatory things such as foreplay. There are times and conditions in which sexual intercourse is said to be *makruh*¹ or *mandub*². Under certain conditions, to have sexual intercourse is prohibited; for example, during daytime in the month of Ramadan and also during women's period. While on pilgrimage to Mecca, the pilgrims should wear special garment called *ihram*. During the whole period they are in *ihram*, not only intercourse but also kissing, touching, and even watching each other for sexual pleasure are banned (Imam Khomeini, 2011, vol. 1, p. 419).

The newlyweds' first night is very important as sexual satisfaction is usually experienced for the first time. For this reason, a section of the books on jurisdiction is dedicated to the etiquette of this night. We shall mention just a few points here.

On this night, it is advised to invite relatives and friends for a celebration. It has a great impact on matrimonial relationship. It is also advised that the bride

1. This term means an activity which is religiously unwelcome but not prohibited.

2. This term means any activity which is religiously advisable but not obligatory.

and the bridegroom perform ablutions since this brings about spiritual light, tranquility, and peace of mind, and washes away all little worries. It is also advised that the bride and the bridegroom begin this night by saying a short prayer and reciting the benediction containing the following ideas, “O Lord! Pray gift me the contentment and affection of this lady and gift her my real contentment; make the tie between us strong and firm, give us compassion towards each other; verily, you like the lawful and dislike the unlawful.” It is also advised that before having intercourse, the husband sits facing the direction of Mecca and puts his hand on his bride’s forehead and recites, “O Lord! This lady is a treasure you have given me in trust, I accept her with your words; if you are to give me a child, pray make it blissful, pious, and a follower of your holy Messenger and protect it from Satan.” It is important that the husband refrains from extravagance and takes care of his bride’s conditions.

Men are not allowed to overlook their wives or neglect their wives’ sexual needs. In Islamic precepts, it is compulsory for a man to have sexual intercourse with his wife at least once every four months. Men should not go to extremes. Women are also advised to pay attention to the sexual demands of their husbands. The holy Prophet of Islam ordered them, “Do not prolong the prayers in order to prevent your husband from having sex with you,” (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, p. 117).

Factors contributive to maximal satisfaction in matrimonial relationship

Behavioral factors

- appropriate and beautiful clothing

Marriage partners should not underestimate the effect of adornment on maximal contentment with matrimonial life. This includes proper dressing and suitable adornment. In various sayings, the Infallible Imams (peace be upon Them) advised men and women to decorate themselves for one another. Imam Baqir (be peace upon Him) says, “Women should not neglect makeup under any circumstances; they should, at least, wear some henna on their hands or hairs and some minimal ornament such as necklace.” Imam Sadiq (be peace upon Him) counts as one of the rights man enjoys the wife’s wearing of her most beautiful clothes and makeup using best available perfumes and preparing herself for him (Hurr Ameli, 1403 lunar Hegira, vol. 14, section 6, hadith 2).

It is worthwhile to mention here that women are encouraged to wear makeup only for their husbands and in their homes. They are not allowed to use makeup and perfume in public places where other people may be tempted or seduced.

Islam also advises that husbands should not neglect to put up decoration for their wives. Imam Kazim (be peace upon Him) was once seen coloring his beards with henna. He was asked why he was doing so. The Imam said by putting up decoration, men help their wives remain chaste. Some women give up chastity because their husbands neglect decoration. Would you like to see your wife in the same condition she sees you in when you neglect decoration? Certainly not. So, she also expects from you what you expect from her. Among the personal traits of God's Messengers are keeping clean, using perfume, shaving, and attending to one's spouse," (ibid). These hadiths indicate that putting up decoration is not preferable only for women; men should also take care of their appearance, their clothing, and their cleanliness. This is very effective in achieving better sexual satisfaction.

Emotional standards of behavior

Among very important factors contributing to better contentment of married couples with their matrimonial life and their successful sexual activity is observing emotional standards of behavior such as expressing love and affection towards one another.

Verbal factors

- emotional standards of talking

It is vitally important that married couples avoid insulting language. Through the exchange of affectionate words, they can enhance their preparation for successful sexual activity. In general, mutual respect is instrumental to satisfactory matrimonial life.

- Verbal attraction

Verbal attraction includes proper tone, suitable wording, and beautiful content in communication. It is conducive to successful matrimonial life and the enhancement of sexual satisfaction. In Islamic precepts, it is advised that people avoid talking too much while having sexual intercourse; they should confine their words to those strengthening attraction between the partners.

The effect of successful sex on matrimonial relationship

Matrimonial contentment partly depends on successful sexual activity of

married couples. Some important aspects of matrimonial contentment are as follows: strength of family establishment, the couples' physical and mental health, the tranquility for the members of the family, prevention of violence and angry behavior in the family, prevention of sexual disorders and deviations, prevention of family disputes, and finally, the reduction of divorce rate. Relevant studies show that a common and important factor responsible for the collapse of family is failure in sexual contentment of married couples. One important cause of family disputes that ends up in divorce is problem in experiencing orgasm and the sexual satisfaction of couples. Clinical observations indicate the necessity of further investigation into the possible ways for solving this problem. A study conducted in the city of Isfahan about the correlation between behavioral disorders among girls and matrimonial problems of their parents showed that increased matrimonial contentment of parents directly leads to the decrease of such disorders (Kajbaf, 1383).

Our discussion so far shows that proper and natural sexual behavior as well as rational and moderate satisfaction of sexual desires play a very important role in physical and mental health. In order to prevent immoral behavior and to guarantee the psychological health relating sexual desires, it is necessary to provide general sex education for adolescents and youngsters. The content of mass media propagation should be revised. Institutions such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, and Ministry of Culture should undertake the responsibility of planning and training in this field. It is also important to inform the public opinion of how important it is to follow this issue. All planning and programs must cohere with the Iranian culture, the general religious attitude of people, and the established customs in society. Various models and patterns of teaching and propagation can be adopted including lectures, seminars, symposiums, conferences, theaters, movie pictures, tracts, posters, pamphlets, and the like. What matters most is maximal attraction of teaching materials that contributes largely to the success of the whole enterprise.

As we mentioned earlier, the family problems are mostly the result of failure to experience sexual satisfaction in matrimonial life. The reason behind this failure is ignorance about the very same fact. Therefore, premarital education is of paramount importance and psychological consultation after marriage is helpful. It is most unfortunate that sufficient attention has

not been paid to the rich cultural source of Islam including the Quranic verses and the sayings of the holy Prophet and the Infallible Imams (be peace upon Them) in this field.

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