

Second Lesson

Our discussion will center on the issue of the modest dress (*hijab*) in Islam but as we had mentioned, we must first hold a more general discussion because the modest dress is not exclusive to Islam. That is, it is not the idea that the modest dress appeared for the first time in the world with Islam. It existed before Islam among ancient peoples other than the Arab nations. It existed in ancient India and in ancient Iran, as well. The modest dress which ancient India and Iran had was much stricter than that which Islam brought. Of course, if we take the Arabian peninsula into consideration, the Islamic modest dress was established, not imitated. That is, Islam imported the modest dress into the Arabian peninsula but it existed in non-Arab lands throughout the world.

It is a phenomena which existed during non-Islamic times. Philosophical, social, economic, ethical and psychological reasons have been given as the cause for the development of this phenomenon and as to how it happened that the modest dress came to appear in history among people. It is necessary to mention these reasons because they have said that these are the causes for the appearance of the modest dress and that it first appeared because of certain very particular conditions which existed in those times. Conditions whereby it was, perhaps, necessary for it to be but now that those conditions no longer exist, there is no reason for the modest dress.

Thus, we have to see what the reasons mentioned are, whether or not they are the real causes or is it, as some people say that which caused the modest dress to come into being was unjust. Is it that from the very beginning the modest dress itself was imposed upon women? If this is so, they conclude that this is even more reason why it should never have come into being.

In the last discussion we mentioned two reasons, one of which was the sense of insecurity. We said that this has been mentioned as a reason for women wearing the modest dress . The other reason mentioned was the sense of asceticism, the sense of struggling against sexual urges. This is something which existed in the world, in both the East and the West. In the East, one of its largest centers was India and in the West, Greece.

The Economic Reason

Another reason given for the modest dress is that they have said that the modest dress developed because of economics, and of course, it was to exploit women. As a result of this, it is unjust. They came and divided things this way. They said history shows that there have been four eras in the relations between men and women, including the present age.

The first age of humanity, according to this view, was a communal age with reference to sex. That is, essentially no family life existed. The second era was when men dominated over women and women were seen as their slaves and a means to serve men. The second era, then, was the era of ownership by man. The third era was the age when women arose in objection to men and the fourth era is the era of equality of rights between men and women.

The first era, the communal age, they say, relates to pre-history. The era of ownership is the longest era that history has recorded where man dominated over woman and they identify Islam as an example of this era. The third era, which is known as the era of rebellion, occurred in the second half of the 19th century. The fourth era is the one which more or less has appeared or is appearing. It is the era of seeking complete equality between men and women's rights.

It is clear that these eras were developed from what others said about economics which refers to the various eras of humanity with the first era being communal, then the feudal era, the era of capitalism and the era of communism. That which they have mentioned as to the economic causes for the appearance of the modest dress does not relate whatsoever to these economic stages mentioned by others.

These four stages expressed in this manner are all erroneous. There are no facts regarding the first era which they mention as being communal. There is no evidence that family life did not exist from the very beginning.

We do not intend to go into detail about these eras but simply to refer to the fact that they say the modest dress relates to the era when men dominated over women. If we do not accept that era, they say that it resulted from men being the mediator for women: A man hired a woman for his own purposes. He kept her in his home to do his work. He left some of his work for a woman to do for him.

This was similar to when they imprisoned slaves and prevented them from leaving to better perform the work of their master. Men saw that it would be to their advantage to put women behind a curtain and prevent their comings and goings so that they would better undertake the work of the house which had been given to them to do. Thus, men did this in order for them to have hired women from the economic

point of view and to have turned them into an instrument. Otherwise there was no reason to do such a thing. Wherever the modest dress has appeared, it was accompanied by such a situation of the employing of women by men to work in the house.

Is it true that the reason existed in those places in the world where the modest dress appeared? We do not deny that perhaps in some corners of the world this situation existed. If men prevented women from leaving their home and prevented others from seeing them in whatever form, if men imprisoned women, the roots of such a cause might have been economic. However, we are discussing Islam. Islam, on the one hand, established and brought the modest dress and, on the other, very directly stated something which is among the very clear aspects of Islam which is that a man has absolutely no right to gain economically from a woman. That is, a woman has economic independence. Great emphasis has been given to this issue.

That is, a man has no right to benefit economically in anyway whatsoever from a woman. The jobs of a woman belong to her. If, within the home itself, work is given to a woman to do if she so desires. But if a woman were to say, "No. I won't do that," a man has no right to force her to do it.

A woman is free in whatever work she does. In the first place, she has a right to refuse; a man has no right to order her to do something. Secondly, if she says, "I will do this for such and such a wage," she has a right to receive a wage, in the case of nursing her child, for instance. Even though a mother has priority to nurse her own child, she still has a right to obtain a wage for it. Her priority is in the sense that if another woman wanted to nurse her child and says, "I will take 1,000 rials a month to nurse the child," the mother herself says, "I will not take more than that," then the mother has priority to nurse the child unless the other woman, for some reason, is more suitable.

A woman has a right to work outside the home as long as it does not harm the family environment. Whatever she earns belongs to her alone, no matter what legitimate work she performs.

It must be clearly recognized, then, that Islamic precepts do not intend for the modest dress to be a means to economically exploit women. If this had been the intention, the rulings would have reflected this. For instance, the precepts would have stated that a man has the right to employ his wife in his home and a woman must wear the modest dress. Then these two things would have been connected. A system which states that a man has no right to exploit a woman but, on the other hand, that same system has established the modest dress, clearly, then, did not establish the modest dress to exploit women.

We do not think, either, that this reason was a very major one for wherever in the world the modest dress existed but some Iranians who have written against the laws of Islam have greatly stressed this point. That is, they say in order for men to be able to keep women in their homes to exploit them and to

turn them into their own tools, they imprisoned them. This is one reason they have given and as we have stated, this reason in no way conforms with Islam.

The Ethical Reason

Another reason they have given for the appearance of the modest dress has an ethical aspect. That is, it relates to the character and nature of individual.

They say it stems from the selfishness of men and men's jealousy. A man dominated over a woman so that he could enjoy her exclusively himself; so that no other man would share with him, not only in sexual intercourse but in everything. He wanted to monopolize a woman so that the touching of her body and even the viewing of her be exclusively his privilege. That is, a type of excessive greed which existed in men caused them to present the modest dress.

Russell says just this. He says that human beings have been able, to a certain extent, to dominate over their greed for wealth in such a way that they later encouraged charity and sharing one's table with others because these related to wealth. They came to regard excessive greed as something disagreeable in human beings but they were not able to control their greed for sex in the same way. Thus, they came and changed the name of this to 'manliness' or 'zeal'.

They considered jealousy and greed under this name to be a virtue whereas if charity is good and if it is good in relation to wealth, it should be good in relation to women as well, or else it is wrong in both areas. How is it that when it comes to something that belongs to a person, it is good to be generous and liberal with it but then when it relates to women, it is evil. No, there is absolutely no difference between them. If it is good, it is good for both and if it is bad, it relates to both.

In the first place, it is not right to compare 'having a wife' to 'having property'. Secondly, from our point of view, there is a difference between jealousy and zeal (passion, fervor or ardency, ghairat). We believe them to be two different feelings. Zeal is a natural instinct given to humanity. It is a collective word. That is, its roots are to preserve society, not an individual. It is like a policeman that God has placed within humanity to preserve future generations.

As we have pointed out, however, much satisfaction a man receives in sexual pleasures, his sense of zeal becomes more weakened along with his sensitivities towards modesty, piety and moral will-power. Lustful men do not object to their wives having affairs; they may even enjoy it and defend such deeds.

Whereas the opposite is true of men who struggle against their ego's desires and lust. In this struggle,

gathering together their moral forces, they dominate over vices such as greed, envy or the worship of money within themselves. They become what the term 'human being' really means. They then devote themselves to serving people as a sense of providing service to others develops within them. Such men have greater 'zeal' or 'sense of manliness' and are more jealous and protective of women. As a matter of fact, they protect all women in general. That is, their conscience does not permit them to allow any kind of aggression against women in society for it is as if they were the protectors of all women.

Imam Ali said, "A noble, zealous person never commits adultery." He did not say 'a jealous person never commits adultery' but rather a zealous one. Why? Because manliness is a noble, human virtue. It is a human virtue which relates to society and its purity. Just as a zealous man does not allow the corruption of women he is related to, neither is he content to see the women of society being corrupted. This is because zeal is other than jealousy. Jealousy is a personal and individual affair and stems from a series of spiritual beliefs but zeal is an emotion and a sensitivity which relates to the human species as a whole.

The secret of the fact that men have a very great sensitivity towards their wife having sexual intercourse with other men is an instinct which creation gave to every man to preserve future generations. If this did not exist, if the singular affection for children did not exist, not even one individual would be inclined towards reproduction. If this sense of wonder did not exist within the human being to protect and guard the place of the seed so that other seeds, which are similar, would not fall there, the relation between the sexes would be completely cut off. No one would know their father and no father would know his child whereas the connection between one generation to another is one of the principles of human society. If it did not exist, there would be no society.

Human beings have been given an instinct which is the basis for the preservation of society and that instinct is this: Women are desirous of preserving their generations and so are men but women are protected as a result. When a child is born, it is clear who its mother is and the mother knows her child. Even if she were to have intercourse with a thousand men, she would know that the future generations are assured but men are not reassured in this way unless they have guarded that woman and created some precautions whereby they are assured of their fatherhood.

Can a person say that we must eliminate this instinct called 'zeal' which exists within human beings? And, that this is the same thing as jealousy? This is something which even those who have a community type of living as far as property is concerned have not said in relation to women.

The Psychological Reason

Some people believe that the modest dress and staying at home are based on psychological reasons and that women have had an inferiority complex towards men from the very beginning. This feeling is based on two reasons: One is that some women think they lack something organic in their body in comparison to men. The other reason is the bleeding during their monthly menstruation and following childbirth.

The monthly period was considered to be a kind of deficiency in ancient times. That is why women were isolated during their monthly period and everybody avoided associating with them.

Perhaps that was the main reason for asking the Holy Prophet a question on this subject. God revealed a special verse in answer to this question. The Quran does not say that menstruation is something deplorable and that a woman is to be isolated during this time and that no one should associate with her. It says that it is a kind of harm leaving the body and during this time, they should not have sexual intercourse. It does not say that they should not associate with each other.

"They ask you about menstruation. Say: It is a kind of harm. Do not have sexual intercourse with women at this time." (2:222)

According to the Quran, it is a kind of harm like many others and it is far from being deplorable.

Abu Dawud related a Tradition of the Holy Prophet: "Ibn Malik said that the Jewish people used to send their wives out of their home when they were menstruating. They did not eat with them and did not drink water from their glass. They did not remain in the same room with them either. For this reason, the Prophet was asked about this and the above verse descended. The Prophet forbade the isolation of women at this time and said, 'Nothing is forbidden except sexual intercourse.'¹

According to Islam, the menstruating woman is muhdis, that is, a person who does not perform the partial or total ritual ablution. Such a person is deprived from performing the ritual prayer and fasting. Every hadas is a kind of ritual impurity which is removed by ritual purification such as a partial or total ablution. By this we mean that the state of menstruation is like the state of having had a wet dream or sexual intercourse, etc. But this ritual state is not special for women and it is removed by partial or total ritual ablution.

Many ideas have been expressed about the fact that women have a sort of deficiency in their feelings and because of this, both men and women thought that women were abased. Whether they are correct or incorrect, there is no relation between this and the philosophy of Islam about women and the modest dress or 'covering'. Islamic precepts neither refer to menstruation nor the modest dress as reasons to consider women lowly or abased.

These, then, are the five causes which others have more or less related and from none of the five which

are mentioned is one able to say that the modest dress is no longer necessary or that it was unjust from the very beginning.

Can the modest dress have another cause or not? May we offer the fact that the modest dress in Islam has other reasons which do not compare to any of these Rve mentioned: the well-being of a person's 'self', family and society.

It is well known that the spirit of the human being, just like a person's body, can either be healthy or sick. What is the cause for its sickness? They have given many reasons. One of the reasons mentioned is frustration, the failure to attain one's desires, deprivation or disillusionment.

Some people have suggested that these sexual frustrations arise from social limitations. With the removal of these limitations, all individuals will then succeed in the area of sexual affairs and sexual frustrations will disappear. This assumption was put forward but the drawbacks to it became quite apparent. It became clear that although it is true that sexual frustration causes psychological illnesses, it cannot be eliminated by the removal of the limits because if we remove social limits, we will only serve to further stimulate sexual urges, thereby increasing demands which only lead to further disillusionment within the human being.

For instance, say that a human being had a limited number of demands, such as the demands in relation to food. Every society has a certain amount of demand for food. If a country has a population of 20 million, the amount of food required is clear. If their supply is greater than that, they cannot consume it. It should not be less but if it is more, they have to throw it away.

When demands are limited, they can be satisfied . Demands can even be decreased in relation to the supply but it has been proved that the demand of certain things in human beings are unlimited. However much they are satisfied, the desire persists. Things which have a quality which are not solely physical are like this. For instance, in the area of material things, if we want to say how much food a society needs, we can estimate this but if we were to ask how much money a society needed, the demand would be unlimited.

We may ask, "How much wheat would it take to satisfy the people of Iran?" This is possible to estimate. But it is more difficult to estimate if we ask, "How much money would satisfy the people of the country?" If you give as much as possible to an individual, he would never say: That's enough. Knowledge is also like this.

Many of the demands of human beings are rooted in unending human desires. When you relate to them, a person still says: I want more. Wealth is also like this. It cannot be satiated. A tradition of the Holy Prophet relates to this. "There are two kinds of hunger which are never fulfilled, the hunger for

knowledge and the hunger for wealth."2

Can one fulfil the ambition of a person? Can a society fulfil the ambition of a person? No. No matter what position a person is given, that person wants an even higher position. Even if you gave him the highest position, he still would not be satisfied. The reason for the development of ethics was because of this very thing, that is, to regulate unending human desires which have created chaos and conflicts.

Sexual enjoyment is limited from the physical point of view. A man can be satisfied from one woman, or, at the most, two. But from the point of view of attachment that a man and a woman develop, even Russell mentions the fact that physical sex differs from the attachment which can result from it. When it takes on this quality, can it be fulfilled? Given a man who has fallen into this way, a man, for instance, who has a harem of a thousand beautiful women. If someone were to say to him, "There is a beautiful woman in such and such a place", would he then say, "No. I am satisfied with my harem and my relations with the women there." There is no question of ever being satiated.

It was because of this that they readily saw that the desire for sex is like wealth. It is insatiable. They came and gave another suggestion. The human being must be made to deviate from this way. A person must be placed upon the unending road, a road that leads no where. Freud suggested it. He first struggled against any kind of social limits and limitations. He then saw that giving people limitless sexual freedom created more difficulties and problems for them. It created far greater psychological disturbances. He said, "This spirit must be directed to other things so that it becomes preoccupied with art, literature, etc. because this way is impossible!" This spirit has to be allowed to develop without anything standing in its way.

Experience and statistics have shown that in the West where sexual freedom is very great and in some areas, there are no limitations, psychological illnesses are greater than in a society which has limitations. The greater the stimulation, the more the desires increase. They increase several times just like fire. Can a person satiate a fire with fuel? This clearly cannot be done.

They say that no matter how you try to prevent a human being from something, the greed for it increases. This is true but the point to note is that the human being develops greed for something which is both forbidden and stimulated but if it is not offered or it is offered less, the human being finds less desire for it. When it is stimulated it is impossible for everyone to satisfy their desires for it no matter how much freedom they are given.

Thus, if there is a kind of limitation and sexual desires are to be satisfied within the marital environment, if society is to be the place of work and activity, if a woman does not have the right to stimulate sexual urges nor a man have the right to seek sexual fulfillment outside the marital environment, if it takes this form, the spirit and morale of people will clearly develop in a more healthy and wholesome way.

As to the family, efforts must be made so that, to the extent possible, marital relations become more and more intimate and whatever will weaken this relationship must be resisted. The limiting of sexual fulfillment to marriage, whatever kind of fulfillment it may be, causes the married couple to develop a more profound union because a man and a woman who knows only her husband to be the source of her pleasure and happiness clearly will develop deeper and stronger ties.

For instance, some people ask why it is that sexual relations of a man without a wife and a woman without a husband are forbidden outside of marriage? Why can they not have sexual relations? We accept the fact that there is a difference but note this point which appears to be very clear to me. In the recent past and in the present among societies which live according to Islamic law, a girl who reaches puberty is not free to take sexual enjoyment from every youth even though the instinctive desire exists. When a boy reaches puberty, a desire and inclination for the opposite sex develops but there are no means to satiate it.

From the beginning he is told, for instance, that he can marry when he reaches the age of 20 and the girl knows that he will marry in a few years. Marriage for them is a very sweet and pleasurable thing. Marriage is a fulfillment of desires after a time of deprivation. That is, sexual urges may not be satisfied outside of marriage.

This boy who is facing a girl for the first time sees her as the person who will satisfy his desires, bring him pleasure and happiness and the girl who faces the boy for the first time, knowing he will bring her happiness and well-being, develop such emotions that are incomparable to anything else.

Marriage and the family center is like this. When the satisfaction of sexual urges is forbidden outside this realm, it becomes the center of happiness.

Thus this issue of forbidding the fulfillment of sexual activities outside of the family center serves to strengthen family solidarity whereas allowing such possibilities outside the family center separates the family. As we will come to point out, the Islamic modest dress is nothing more than this; the limiting or restricting the sexual needs to marriage.

Now we will look at society. It has been said that the modest dress paralyzes half of the society. I accept that if the modest dress were that which they say existed among the Indians or that which existed in ancient Iran, this may be true.

But the Islamic modest dress does not say that a woman should be imprisoned nor does it say that a woman has no right to leave her home or to do a particular job which is of a social or economic nature. Islamic precepts say, as we will read in the verses of the Holy Quran and in the Traditions, that a woman

who leaves her home does not have the right to leave in such a way that she stimulates other men or attracts them towards herself. This is a particular duty of women. And no man has the right to cast a lustful look towards a woman who leaves her home. This is a particular duty of men.

If a woman did not speak in stimulating tones in a social situation, if this did not happen, would boys and girls not study better? If boys did not have the right to flirt, would society not function better? If a woman is wearing the modest dress and goes to buy something and the seller knows that this is not the place for games, which way is better? Clearly if there is the Islamic modest dress, the human task force will most certainly perform with more efficiency and in this manner, work productivity will improve.

That which has been created clearly prevents work from progressing as it should. Students do not study; marketing has been made to deviate from its main purpose which is selling quality goods. Instead they empty the pockets of people by showing a beautiful woman who is selling something. Men go to buy, not caring what the product is, to enable them to talk to her. Will this cause society to deviate?

Thus, from the point of view of work and social activity, the improvement of society dictates that it should not be the place for the stimulation or fulfillment of sexual urges and the Islamic modest dress serves just this purpose.

1. Sunnan I Abi Dawud. Al Haid, p.102

2. Sunan I al Daremi, Moqaddamah, p.32

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