



BĪNAMĀZĪ II. IN ISLAM

ii. In Islam

In Islam the performance of ritual prayer (*namāz*) and certain other devotional acts are forbidden during *bīnamāzī*, the state or period of menstrual discharge (Ar. *ḥayḏ*). The only Koranic reference to the subject is found in 2:222, where menstruation is described as *aḍan* (lit. “harm”), a word understood to mean impurity in this context, and men are forbidden intercourse with their menstruating wives.

Under the general rubric of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) Islamic jurisprudence has given considerable attention to various aspects of menstruation, usually in conjunction with two other types of discharge—*esteḥāḏa* (all forms of metrorrhagia other than menstruation) and *nefās* (lochial bleeding)—the three together being known as *al-demā’ al-ṭalāṭa* (the three bloods).

The different schools of Islamic law are in broad agreement on most matters pertaining to menstruation. The earliest age at which menstruation can begin is generally held to be nine, and some Shi’ite authorities (e.g., Komeynī, 1359, p. 46) even specify that if a girl thought to be younger experiences a discharge exhibiting the characteristics of menstruation she must in fact have passed her ninth birthday. Shafe’ites allow for the possibility that menstruation may begin as early as seven. The age of menopause is set by Hanafites at 55 and left judiciously undetermined by Shafe’ites. Certain Shi’ite scholars (e.g., Komeynī, 1359, p. 46) make a curious distinction between women that are *sayyeds* (descendants of the Prophet) and those that are not, fixing menopause for the



former at sixty and for the latter at fifty (for a similar distinction between Qorayšī and non-Qorayšī women see Ḥellī, I, p. 29). The minimum length of menstrual discharge is said to be three consecutive days and the maximum, ten days; any metrorrhagia lasting between three and ten days is presumed to be menstrual, except in the case of a prepubescent girl or a woman (known technically as *ā'esa* or *yā'esa*) who has reached menopause. Bleeding that persists beyond ten days is reclassified on the eleventh day as *esteḥāza*. Despite the apparent rigidity, not to say artificiality, of these attempts at legally defining a biological phenomenon, some provision is made for irregularities in the beginning and duration of the menstrual period.

Menstruating women cannot perform any ritual prayers that require ablution, and the onset of menstruation while performing a prayer invalidates it. They may, however, engage in prayers, such as the funerary prayer (*namāz-e janāza*), that do not require ablution. Shi'ite writers recommend that at the time of prayer a menstruating woman should cleanse herself of blood, perform the minor ablution (*wozū*), and sit where she customarily performs her prayers, facing the *qebla* and reciting various forms of supplication (*monājāt*) and petitionary prayer (*do'ā*); Ḥellī, I, p. 30). *Her recitations must not, however, include any Koranic verses or even fragments thereof, because—as all schools agree—a menstruating woman must not touch a written copy of the Koran or recite any part of it. She is similarly barred from fasting; all days of the obligatory fast of Ramaẓān missed during menstruation must be made up later. Finally, a menstruating woman is forbidden to enter a mosque or to engage in ṭawāf (circumambulation of the Ka'ba),*

Vaginal intercourse with a menstruating woman is forbidden; violation of this prohibition necessitates atonement on the part of the husband through an act of charity. Shi'ite *feqh* designates anal intercourse with a menstruating woman as extremely reprehensible but stops short of prohibiting it and does not call for atonement by the one who engages in it (Ḳomeynī, 1359, pp. 47-48). At the end of the menstrual period, the woman must perform a complete ablution (*ḡosl*) identical to that necessitated by sexual intercourse; it must, however, be preceded by a minor ablution, which is not the case with the *ḡosl* that follows intercourse. The complete ablution is mandatory for the resumption of prayer and other ritual acts, but not for the renewal of marital relations.

Finally, the end of the menstrual period marks the beginning of the waiting time (*'edda*) that must elapse before a divorced or widowed woman can remarry.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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