

*The
Muslim Woman's
Handbook*

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Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter One: ‘Ibādah (Worship)	1
Salah (Prayer)	2
Prayer in the Mosque	3
Congregational Prayer at Home	7
Leading the Prayer	8
Jum’uah (Friday) Prayer	8
Eid Prayer	9
Sawm (Fasting)	11
Zakat	12
Hajj	13

The Muslim Woman's Handbook

Reading Qur'an	14
Jihad	14
Summary	16
Chapter Two: Tahārah	
(Purity and Cleanliness)	18
Hayd (Menstruation)	19
Minimum and Maximum Length of Period	22
Istihādah (Non-menstrual flow)	24
Nifās (Post-natal Bleeding)	26
Personal Hygiene	28
Summary	29
Chapter Three: Hijab	30
The External Hijab	31
The Internal Hijab	38
The Voice	39
Mixing	41
Bars and the Like	42
Handshakes and Touching	44
"Purdah"	46
Summary	47
Chapter Four: Social Life	49
Sport and Exercise	50
Music and Singing	53

Contents

Movies and Cinemas	56
Laughter and Jokes	57
Hobbies	58
Visiting	59
Da'wah	61
Summary	62
Chapter Five: Careers, Education and Work	63
Knowledge and Education	69
Religious Knowledge	70
Secular Knowledge	70
Working Outside the Home	72
Summary	79
Chapter Six: Marriage	80
Finding a Partner	81
Rights and Duties	88
Rights	89
Obligations	90
Summary	97
Chapter Seven: Divorce	98
Prevention is Better than Cure	98
When a Marriage goes Wrong	101
Talāq	102
Khul'	103

The Muslim Woman's Handbook

Mubāra'ah	105
Li'an	105
Custody of Children	106
Summary	107
Chapter Eight: Health	108
Medical Examination and Treatment	109
Medicines and Treatments	110
Herbal Remedies	111
Blood Transfusions and Organ Transplants	112
Nutrition and Diet	113
Smoking and Other Addictions	116
Contraception	119
Pregnancy and Childbirth	123
Breastfeeding	126
Subfertility and Infertility	129
Summary	134
Glossary	135
Bibliography	139



2

Tahārah (Purity and Cleanliness)

In Arabic, the word tahārah carries the meaning of purity, in both a physical and spiritual sense. In this chapter, we will be discussing the physical aspects of the term, in particular regarding menstruation and post-natal bleeding.

Before salah, a person must perform ablution, either wudu or ghusl depending on the nature of the najasah (impurity). In brief, passing wind,

urine or stools, or vomiting, necessitates wudu. Ghusl should be performed following sexual intercourse, emission of seminal fluid, and the ceasing of menstruation and post-natal bleeding.¹³

Obviously, the areas of special concern to women are menstruation and post-natal bleeding, and it is these which will be dealt with in more detail in this chapter.

Hayd (Menstruation)

Hayd is the Arabic term referring to the period or monthly flow of blood. When a girl starts having periods, she is regarded in Islam as mukallaf (adult, responsible), and must perform all the Islamic obligations, such as prayer, fasting and so on. There is no set age of becoming mukallaf as it varies from one individual to the next, and is determined by hereditary factors, diet, climate, among others.

The menstrual flow is described by scholars as having certain characteristics. The blood is red, thick and has

13. See Badawi, *Tahārah*, p 9 ff (wudu), p 18 ff (ghusl), for more detailed discussion.

a distinct, unpleasant odour. Other types of discharge may be regarded as *istihādah* (see below). Menstruation is not regarded in Islam as a “curse”,¹⁴ but as one of several normal bodily functions which render a person in need of a major ablution before he/she can pray (see above). There are things you cannot do at this time, and at the end of the period you must perform *ghusl* before resuming normal activity. It does not mean that the woman is considered dirty; rather the Qur'an describes menstruation as a “hurt” (see Al-Baqarah 2:222), so the restrictions on normal activity at this time are to be regarded as a mercy and a relief.

During your period, you cannot:

- Pray, i.e. perform *salah*. *Du'a* is acceptable at all times. The *salah* missed does not have to be made up later on.

14. Some western women refer colloquially to menstruation as “the curse” - a reflection of the popular notion that menstruation is the “curse” inflicted on Eve and her daughters as punishment for tempting Adam to disobey God. Of course, Islam totally rejects this idea.

Tahārah (Purity and Cleanliness)

- Fast, but any obligatory fasts missed must be made up later on.
- Perform tawāf (circumambulation of the Ka'bah during Hajj or 'umrah.
- Have sexual intercourse. Embracing, kissing are acceptable - it is the act of coition itself which is forbidden.
- Touch a mushaf except for purposes of learning or teaching it to others. Some scholars (e.g. Shafi'is), say there is no restriction on touching books which contain Qur'anic texts in Arabic, where these form less than 50% of the text. An example would be a translation and commentary on the Qur'an.¹⁵ There is no restriction on reciting small portions of the Qur'an without touching it, during one's period.¹⁶

15. Badawi, *Tahārah*, p 16, footnote 33

16. Ibid