40054 - Using drawings and pictures to learn medicine

the question

I am a medical student, and i wish to become a good doctor one day InshaAllah. Reguarding my education my problems are

1) My books contain figures of the human body both male and female, and I do not know if Hijab permits such knowledge to be learned,

2) As a student I have to cut open dead human bodies to study the various parts of the human body. I do not know if this is haraam or halaal

3) In exams students draw pictures of specific parts in their answers (not of the whole human body). I know the hadeeth that all picture makers will be in the fire, but i donot know if it is permissable to draw pictures for educational purposes.

Please advise me as I do not wish to go beyond the Islamic Shareeah.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is well known in our religion that the basic principle with regard to drawings and pictures of animate beings is that they are haraam, because of the many ahaadeeth in which it says that they are forbidden and warn against them. We have previously explained that in a number of questions on this site. Please see, for example, question no. 7222.

It is well known in the principles of fiqh on which there is consensus that in cases of necessity, forbidden things are permitted, so the ruling may change from prohibition to permission if that will lead to achieving one of the five necessities that Islam came to protect, which are: religion, life, physical health, honour and wealth.

Because medicine is one of the necessary sciences that people need, to such an extent that some scholars regarded it as a communal obligation, this means that some things are permitted which are basically forbidden, in order to fulfil this communal obligation.

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Rawdat al-Taalibeen (1/223):

With regard to sciences, some of them are a communal obligation, such as medicine. End quote.

Indeed, Muwaffaq al-Deen al-Baghdaadi narrated in his book al-Tibb min al-Kitaab wa'l-Sunnah (187) that Imam al-Shaafa'i said:

I do not know of any branch of knowledge, after knowledge of halaal and haraam, that is more noble than medicine. End quote.

Even if a doctor does not treat women except in cases of necessity, he must learn how to treat both sexes, because a woman may not be able to find a female doctor in a certain specialty or in a certain city. Also, knowledge of medicine is based on understanding the makeup of the human body, and the features of its various parts, and details of their functions. How well the doctor understands that will determine how well he knows medicine and how successful he is in ridding people of problems and diseases.

Hence there is nothing wrong with the doctor studying drawings that show the human body, whether they are of men or women, and there is nothing wrong – in sha Allaah – with using drawings in exams for students of medicine and life sciences, as that will help them to understand properly and learn this knowledge correctly.

In our religion it is permissible for women to treat men in cases of necessity.

It was narrated that al-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidh (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: We were with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), bringing water, treating the wounded and carrying the slain back to Madeenah. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2882).

Ibn Hajar said, commenting on this hadeeth in Fath al-Baari (6/52):

This shows that it is permissible for a non-mahram woman to treat a non-mahram man in cases of necessity. End quote.

In our religion there is also evidence which indicates that it is permissible to make pictures and images for children’s toys, because children need to play and learn. See the answer to question no. 9473.

In a Fatwa issued by the scholars of the Standing Committee, there is evidence which indicates that it is permissible to make pictures in cases of necessity, such as pictures to prove the identity of a person and the like. See the answer to question no. 34904 and 39806.

As for making pictures and drawing parts of the body separately, such as the head or the chest, many scholars are of the view that it is permissible. See the answer to question no. 13633.

All of the above indicates that it is permissible to use drawing and pictures in studying medicine, etc.

A similar fatwa has also appeared previously on our site in the answer to question no. 10228 .

And Allaah knows best.