92820 - Dissecting dead bodies in order 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.

Fiqh councils and scientific committees have undertaken detailed studies to come up with the ruling on dissecting human bodies in order to learn medicine, and that is because this issue has to do with two important principles:

1 –The sanctity of the deceased in sharee’ah, and the strict instructions to respect and honour the deceased.

2 – The necessary interests that may be served by dissection in many cases.

We will quote fatwas that have been issued on this matter by academic bodies and some contemporary scholars, which may by summed up by noting that there is nothing wrong with using dead bodies for dissection to learn and teach medicine, but that is subject to the condition that the body not be that of someone whose life is protected by sharee’ah, and it should not be done more

than is absolutely necessary.

It says in the statements of the Islamic Fiqh Council in Makkah al-Mukarramah, quoting from Fiqh al-Nawaazil by al-Jayzaani (4/208-209):

Based on necessities which call for dissection or autopsy of the dead body and in which dissection or autopsy serves an interest which outweighs the concern about violating the sanctity of the deceased, the Fiqh Council of the Muslim World League has determined the following:

1 – It is permissible to dissect a dead body for one of the following purposes:

(a)Examination in the case of a criminal investigation to find out the causes of death or what crime was committed; that is when the qaadi (judge) is uncertain of the causes of death and thinks that dissection or autopsy is the way to find out these causes.

(b)Investigation of diseases in cases where dissection or autopsy is called for so that in the light of this post mortem examination, precautions may be taken or suitable treatments may be determined for those diseases.

(c)Learning and teaching medicine as is done in schools of medicine.

2 – In the case of dissection for the purpose of teaching, attention should be paid to the following guidelines:

(a)If the body is that of a known person, it is essential that he have given permission before his death for his body to be dissected, or his heirs must give permission for that after his death. The body of a person whose life is protected by sharee'ah should not be dissected except in cases of necessity.

(b)The dissection should be limited to whatever is necessary, so as not to tamper unnecessarily with the body of the deceased.

(c)The bodies of women should not be dissected by anyone other than female doctors, unless there are none.

3 – In all cases, all parts of the dissected body must be buried afterwards.

In the book al-Buhooth al-'Ilmiyyah by the Council of Senior Scholars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2/83-84) it says the following:

This matter may be divided into three categories:

1 – Dissection or autopsy in the case of a criminal investigation

2 – Dissection in the case of an investigation into an infectious disease, so that precautions may be taken in the light of this investigation to protect others from the disease

3 – Dissection for scientific purposes, for learning and teaching

After exchanging views, discussing and studying this issue, the Council has determined the following:

With regard to the first and second categories, the Council thinks that permitting them serves many interests in the fields of security, justice and protecting society from infectious diseases; the violation of the dissected body is outweighed by the many public interests that are served by that.

Hence the Council is unanimously agreed that it is permissible to dissect bodies for these two purposes, whether the body that is dissected belonged to someone who was protected by sharee'ah or not.

With regard to the third category, which is dissection for educational purposes, since Islam came to achieve and increase that which is in people's interests, and to ward off and reduce that which is detrimental to their interests, and as it seeks to do the lesser of two evils in order to ward off the greater, then if there is a conflict of interests, the greater interest must be served;

And since dissecting animals other than humans cannot replace dissection of humans;

And since dissection serves many purposes that are seen in scientific progress in various fields of

medicine;

Then the Council believes that it is permissible to dissect human bodies in general, but because Islam pays a great deal of attention to the dignity of the Muslim in death as in life, because of the report narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawood and Ibn Maajah from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Breaking the bone of the deceased is like breaking it when he was alive”;

And since dissecting involves a loss of dignity, and since there is no necessity for dissecting them because it is possible to obtain dead bodies that are not protected by sharee’ah, the Council believes that dissections should be restricted to such bodies and not bodies of people who are protected by sharee’ah. End quote.

In Majmoo’ Fataawa Ibn Baaz (22/349) it says the following:

If the deceased was protected by sharee’ah during his lifetime – whether he was a Muslim or a kaafir, whether a man or a woman – then it is not permissible to dissect the body, because that is mistreatment and violating his sanctity. It is proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Breaking the bone of the deceased is like breaking it when he was alive.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (2792).

But if he was not protected, such as an apostate or a non-Muslim in a state of war against the Muslims, then I do not see anything wrong with dissecting his body for medical purposes. End quote.

And Allaah knows best.