



## Women are your fields ?

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Your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God, and know that you are destined to meet Him ... [ Qur'an 2:223 ]

Polemics against Islam argue that this verse discriminates against women. They argue that the Qur'an is equating women with "land" or "property". Further they say or claim that it is an insult for women to be compared to a "tilth". **1** In support for their erroneous interpretation they cite the controversial author Irshad Manji. **2** Manji in her book **3** mocked the verse in question and wrote:

- 1:** Note: "*tilth*" is the most proper translation for the Arabic word *harth* in this ayah.
- 2:** Although Manji labels herself as a reformer, we label her as a "pseudo-Muslim" since she openly distorts and mocks passages from the Qur'an, a thing that does not befit any true Muslim. It think it is very likely that this woman only labels herself as a Muslim reformer in order to succeed more in corrupting the minds of Muslims. She clearly wants to influence young Muslims with her ideas and views that are clearly in contradiction with the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah. Whatever the case maybe, her views and ideas in regards to Islam are from an Islamic point of view heretical. She belongs to the people of misguidance.
- 3:** Manji's book, "The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith", has been critically reviewed by Sheema Khan, chair of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Canada. In her review Khan writes: "... In her opening chapter, Irshad Manji lays out the premise of her book: "Prophet Muhammad ... said that religion is the way we conduct ourselves towards others—not theoretically, but actually. By that standard, how Muslims behave is Islam." The remainder of the book is a collage of Muslims behaving badly. In the mind of the author, the problem is thus with Islam and, by corollary, its prime source, the Qur'an. The problem is that Manji's *selective reading* of the quote is nowhere remotely close to what the Prophet said or meant. The first rule of Islamic scholarship is that one should undertake a comprehensive review of related Prophetic narrations and Qur'anic verses. Knowledge of the original language—classical Arabic—is an asset, if not essential. Such a comprehensive approach leads to deeper understanding and safeguards against jumping to false conclusions...In this case, a literal translation reads: "the religion is how you deal with people." ... The Qur'an rebukes those who pray yet refuse even the smallest acts of kindness. Muslims are enjoined to treat the creation—animals, people, the environment—with justice, mercy and respect ..If Muslims are misbehaving, it is in spite of the exhortations of the Qur'an to do otherwise. Manji's convoluted methodology of interpretation is repeated throughout the book. She frequently relies on literal translations of Qur'anic verses, disregards context and shows no interest in probing deeper. She has chosen to ignore completely centuries of vigorous interpretive discussion, diversity and dialogue on the Qur'an .... One can sense that Manji is travelling on her own path, trying to reconcile a blurred vision of Islam with basic issues of justice. Yet there is no compassion, no mercy in her cathartic diatribe. Perhaps there are personal issues that need to be reconciled—issues dating to a traumatic childhood, where the healing powers of forgiveness could bring peaceful closure. It is almost as though she is trying to justify leaving the faith by pointing to fragmentary visions of history, biased analysis and the dysfunction of Muslims. In the words of the Qur'an, it is a behavioural pattern of "contending with falsehood to refute the truth." ... A book like this does, however, affect Muslims' daily lives, because it spreads so much false information about the faith, which in the post-9/11 era, heightens the polarization between civilizations..." [ Literary Review of Canada, vol. 10 , no. 11 , Dec. 2003, pp. 12-14 ].

one more passage from the Koran bowled me over. "Women are your fields," it says. "Go then, into your fields when you please. Do good works and fear God." Huh ? Go into women when you please, yet do good ? Are women partners or property ? Partners, insists Jamal Badawi, renowned Koranic scholar. He assures me that this "sexually enlightened" verse serves as a defense of foreplay. Like fields, women need tender loving care in order to turn sperm into real human beings. The farmer's "seed is worthless unless you have fertile land that will give it growth," Badawi says, looking quite satisfied with his progressive explanation. But he has only addressed the words, "God into your fields." What about the words, 'when you please ?' Doesn't that qualifier give men undue power ? The question remains: Which paradigm does Allah advocate - Adam and Eve equals or women as land to be plowed [ *excuse me, stroked* ] on a whim ? [4](#)

### Response:

First of all the original Arabic of the first part in this ayah [ verse ] reads: "...fa'tu harthakum annaa shi'tum.." which means: "...so come unto your tilth as ye like.." [ 2:223 ]. "Anna shi'tum" in the context of this verse clearly means: "as you like" or: "in whatever manner you choose" . This meaning of the text is confirmed by a hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim in their "Sahih" , see:

Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allaah said: The Jews used to say that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would have a squint. Then this ayah was revealed: "...Your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like.." [ 2:223 ]. The Messenger of Allaah [ peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him ] said: "From the front or from the back, so long as it is in the vagina." [5](#)

The verse in question [ 2:223 ] was revealed to rebut the claims of the Jews in regards to having sex with one's wife in a non-missionary position. [6](#) Ibn Taymiyyah confirms this in his Fataawa:

it is narrated in al-Saheehayn that the Jews used to say that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would be born with a squint. The Muslims asked the Prophet [ peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him ] about that, then this verse was revealed: "...Your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God, and know that you are destined to meet Him..." [ al-Baqara 2:223 ] .... [7](#)

[4](#): Irshad Manji, "The Trouble with Islam Today" [ St. Martin's Griffin 2005 ] , p. 35

[5](#): Muslim 4/156, al-Bukhaari 8/154

[6](#): Elizabeth Fisher writes in her book: "...Positions in marital intercourse were legislated by the Talmudic rabbis. In one part of the Talmud, 'A man may do all that he will with his wife' , but *most* other sources condemn 'intercourse not in the usual way ( missionary position )' . One second-century rabbi issued a fiat against intercourse where the woman is above the man..."[ Elizabeth Fisher, "Woman's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society" , Anchor Press 1979, p. 358 ]. Even Maimonides states that a Jew should "not" deviate from the common practise [ missionary-position sex ] . Although he follows the opinion that a husband 'may' do with his wife whatever pleases him, he adds the following which is not included in the Talmud: "...nevertheless the pious way is not to act lightly in this matter, and to sanctify oneself during intercourse. ..And he ought *not* to deviate from the *common practice* .." [ Mishneh Torah, Issurei Biah, 21:9 ]. In another Jewish source we read: "She on top and him below—this is the way of brazenness; she below and him on top—this is the way of proper intercourse" [ Gittin 70a ]. According to the Shulchan Aruch [ Orach Chaim 240:4 ] one may not kiss his wife's genitals nor look at them. Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams states: "...The Bavli strongly discourages any sort of indecorous sexual intercourse by linking it to birth defects.."[ Source: "Judaism and Disability", Gallaudet University Press 1998, p.116 ].

[7](#): Shayk Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 32/267

The previous findings support our view that “Anna shi'tum” should be translated as “in whatever manner you like” rather than “whenever you like”. Someone might object to this argument on the ground that “Anna” can also mean: “whenever” [8](#). Our response is that the context of this verse clarifies and qualifies the specific meaning intended by Allah here. In various authentic narrations we read that Allah revealed this metaphorical expression to rebut the Jewish claim or belief that whoever approaches his wife from a back position, the child born as a result of this intercourse will be cross-eyed. In other words the context of this verse was a debate between Muslims and Jews about the permissibility of having sex with one’s wife in a non-missionary position. The Muslims and Jews did “not” discuss “when” intercourse was permissible but “how” intercourse was permissible. Secondly Islamic Law [ sharia ] gives women the right to refuse sexual intercourse when engaging in sexual activity will be detrimental to their well-being. [9](#) In addition the Holy Qur’an “forbids” a husband to have sex with his wife during menstruation , Hajj or the fast in Ramadhan. In other words Islamic Law cancels out the view that a husband can have sex with his wife “..whenever he likes..”. Therefore “Anna” cannot mean or indicate “whenever” here. And finally the expression “..Anna shi'tum..” is explained by the Holy Prophet himself as: “From the front or from the back, so long as it is in the vagina”. [10](#) The Prophet’s explanation confirms that “Anna” does not refer to “time” but “manner” in this verse. Many respected translators agree:

Your wives are a tillage for you. Go, then into your tillage “as” you will .. [11](#)  
 Your wives are your tilth ; go, then, unto your tilth “as” you may desire.. [12](#)  
 Your wives are your field, so go into your field “whichever way” you like.. [13](#)  
 Your women are a tilth for you [ to cultivate ] so go to your tilth “as” you will.. [14](#)

In addition, Ibn Abbas explains “Ana shi'tum” as:

as ye will – “as” you please, from behind or front as long as the penetration is in the pudendum. [15](#)

We conclude that “Anna shi'tum” should be translated as “in whatever manner you like” rather than “whenever you like”. The word “Anna” does not refer to “time” but “manner” in this verse.

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- [8](#): William Montgomery Watt in his note on verse 2:223 states : “... The Arabic anna, ‘as’ , may refer to time or manner ; those who take it in the second sense say it refers to the *various postures* in intercourse..”[ William Montgomery Watt, “Companion To The Quran”, Oneworld Pubns Ltd ; 2nd edition 1994, p 41 ].
- [9](#): This law is derived from the hadith: “there shall be no infliction of harm on oneself or others” [ source: Ibn Maajah 2340 , classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Irwa’ al-Ghaleel 896 ]. The hadith in question forbids a husband to harm his wife physical and emotional. In other words all manners of sexual intercourse that might or do harm the wife are forbidden. Therefore a husband is not allowed to force his wife into sexual intercourse. Nor is he allowed to call upon her when she is ill, overtired, emotionally drained or not in the appropriate frame of mind etc. [ see Fataawa az-Zawaaaj wa Ishratun-Nisaa, p. 103; Fataawa al-Marah ]. In addition Dr. Shehzad Saleem writes: “..the basis of refusal by the husband or wife must also be taken in consideration. If either of them is *tired, sick or simply not in the proper mood* and in the appropriate frame of mind then it does not entail any wrath of the Almighty. It is only when a spouse starts to deliberately evade such natural needs of the other that the attitude becomes questionable..” [ Shehzad Saleem, “Islam and Women: Misconceptions and Misperceptions” in: ‘Renaissance’, February 2005, Volume 15, Issue 2 ].
- [10](#): Ibn Abi Hatim 2/693, Muslim 4/156, al-Bukhaari 8/154
- [11](#): See “The Majestic Quran: An English Rendition of Its Meanings”, edited by Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Al-Badawi , Uthman Hutchinson , Mostafa Badawi, Abd Al-Lateef Whiteman . Translators: Nureddin Uzunoglu, Ali Ozek [ Nawawi Foundation ( Chicago ) : IBN Khaldun Foundation ( London ) , 2000 ] , p. 35
- [12](#): Muhammad Asad, “The Message of the Qur’an” [ The Book Foundation, 2003 ] , Vol. 1, p. 60
- [13](#): M. A. S. Abdel Haleem: “The Qur’an: A New Translation” [ Oxford University Press, 2004 ] , p. 25
- [14](#): Pickthall: The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an : Explanatory Translation [ Amana Publications 1996 ] p. 33
- [15](#): Al-Firuzabadi, “Tanwir al-miqbās min Tafsir Ibn ‘Abbas”[ Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya ] , p. 30

Secondly it is also incorrect to say that the verse gives to men alone the right of decision regarding sexual positions. <sup>16</sup> One should realize that the verse is only addressed to men because men asked the Prophet about the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position. Further we read in various authentic narrations that this question was posed to the Prophet because the Jews used to say that whoever penetrates the vagina of his wife from a back position, the child born as a result of this intercourse will be *cross-eyed*. In response to these questions about the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position, and the claims made by the Jews, Allah revealed "...Your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like.." [ Qur'an 2:223 ]. Allah revealed this verse to demonstrate that having sex in a non-missionary position is "*lawful*" and does not cause birth defects [ as the Jews claimed ]. Allah did "*not*" intend by this verse to give to men alone the right of decision regarding sexual positions. The context and story behind this verse disproof such view. The text does not say "only men have the right to choose sexual positions". In addition we shall cite the next hadith in order to demonstrate that the Prophet was of the opinion that sexual relationships between a husband and wife should be based on "mutual" respect for each other's wishes or preferences. Umar Ibn al-Khattab is reported to have said: "The Prophet prohibited the practice of 'azl with one's wife without her consent" [ Al Musnad, Vol.1 p. 31 ] Although the chain of this hadith is not strong, it's rule is authenticated by the fact that Umar himself is reported to have forbidden the practice of 'azl without the consent of the wife. Shayk Yusuf al-Qaradawi states:

It is reported that 'Umar forbade the practice of coitus interruptus without the consent of the wife .... <sup>17</sup>

Muslim scholars conclude:

With regard to 'azl .. the scholars say that one should not engage in 'azl with a free woman except with her permission, because she has the right to have children. Moreover, withdrawing without her permission diminishes her pleasure, because the woman's pleasure can only be completed after ejaculation. So not asking her permission causes her to lose out on pleasure and on the possibility of having children. Hence we state the condition that this may only be done with her permission. <sup>18</sup>

In another fatwa we read:

Practising 'azl – which means ejaculating outside the vagina – is permissible, but that is subject to the condition that it be with the wife's permission, because one of her rights is "full enjoyment" .. <sup>19</sup>

As one can clearly see Islam gives women the right to sexual pleasure or "full enjoyment". In other words a husband is required to satisfy his wife fully. To ignore one's wife's wishes or preferences in regards to sexual activity would diminish her pleasure and result in "not" fulfilling her right.

<sup>16</sup>: This erroneous claim is made by Fatima Mernissi.

<sup>17</sup>: Shayk Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam" [ Al Falal Foundation ] , p. 196

<sup>18</sup>: See: "Islam: Questions and Answers - Jurisprudence and Islamic Rulings: Transactions - Part 2" by Muhammad Saed Abdul-Rahman, [ MSA Publication Limited, 2004 ], p.28.

<sup>19</sup>: See: "Islam: Questions and Answers - Jurisprudence and Islamic Rulings: Transactions - Part 3" by Muhammad Saed Abdul-Rahman, [ MSA Publication Limited, 2004 ], p.191. Ibn Taymiyyah said: "With regard to 'azl, some of the scholars regarded it s haraam, but the view of the four imams is that it is permissible with the wife's permission. And Allaah knows best" [ see: Majmoo' al-Fataawa 32/10 ].

## The Metaphor

In the previous section we demonstrated that the expression “Anna shi'tum” should be translated as “in whatever manner you like” rather than “whenever you like”. In addition we refuted the view that the verse gives to men alone the right of decision regarding sexual positions. In this section we shall discuss the meaning of the metaphor “your wives are as a tilth unto you”. Polemics against Islam argue that this metaphor insults women. They argue that the Qur'an is equating women with property. This view however is incorrect. The word “tilth” [ “harth” in Arabic ] in this ayat [ verse ] is a metonymy for the vulva of women. In other words the “vagina” of a woman is likened to a “tilth”, not the woman herself as a person ! [20](#) This is confirmed by Ibn Abbas in his tafsir:

Your wives are as a *tilth* unto you..He says: the *vulvas* of your wives are plantations for your offspring [21](#)

Imam al-Qurtubi writes:

The ayat uses the word “harth” and so this must apply to the vagina, because than entails fertility [22](#)

As mentioned earlier this verse was revealed because the Jews in Madinah used to say that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would have a squint. To prove their claim wrong Allah tells Muslims that the vagina of a woman is like a “tilth” or “fertile field”. Allah used this metaphor to clarify that however the seed was put in the vagina , the result will be the same. For this reason Allah states in the second part of the verse that it is lawful for a husband to approach his wife in a non-missionary position. The words “...so come unto your tilth as ye like ...” were revealed to affirm the freedom of ways to carry out sexual activity. The Indian scholar, Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, confirms this in work “Hujjat Allah al-Baligah”, see:

The Jews had unnecessarily restricted *the postures of sexual intercourse* without any divine authority. The Ansar [ of Madinah ] being their friends, followed their practice and used to say, 'If a man has intercourse with his wife through the vagina while he is on her back, the child will have a squint.' Thus the verse, “So go in to your tillage as you will” was revealed; that is, it is immaterial whether the husband is on top of his wife or on her back as long as intercourse is through the vagina, which constitutes the tillage. This is so because these matters have nothing to do with religious or social policy but are entirely a matter of personal taste. Such sayings were among the absurdities of the Jews and Allah Ta'ala abolished them. [23](#)

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**20:** This view is supported by the fact that Allah in another verse also uses the word “Women” as a reference to the female sexual organ, see: “..They ask you [ Prophet ] about menstruation. Say, ‘Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from women during it...’[ 2:222 ]. Ibn Kathir in his tafsir states that this quranic statement means: “*avoid the sexual organ*” [ Tafsir Ibn Kathir, vol. 1, Darussalam 2000, p. 616 ]. This meaning is confirmed by the fact that the Prophet himself explained the verse as followed: “Do everything you wish except sexual intercourse”[ Ahmad 3:132 ]. The Prophet’s explanation clarifies that the verse should be understood as: “...Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from a woman’s sexual organ during it...” [ Qur’an 2:222 ]. In other words the verse does “not” instruct men to keep away from menstruating women, but to keep away from their “sexual organ” during their monthly period.

**21:** Al-Firuzabadi, “Tanwir al-miqbās min Tafsir Ibn ‘Abbas”[ Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya ], p. 30

**22:** Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, Tr: Aisha Bewley [ Dar Al-Taqwa 2003 ] Vol. 1, p. 569

**23:** See: Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlwi, “Hujjat Allah al-Baligah”, Vol. 2, p. 134

## Conclusion:

The story behind the verse in question, in addition to the tafsir given by Ibn Abbas and Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, have led me to the conclusion that the first part of the verse should be read as:

the vulvas of your wives are like a “fertile field” or “tilth” unto you. Because of this you can approach your wife’s vulva [ “tilth” ] in any posture you like [ i.e. it does not matter how the seed is put into the vulva, the result will be the same because the sexual organ of a woman is like a “tilth” or “fertile field” ]

Or it can be said that the words “...your wives are as a tilth unto you...” were revealed to clarify that it is in the tilth that the child will grow and it is from there that it will come out. For this reason it was absolutely wrong for the Jews in Medinah to claim or say that whoever approaches his wife from a back position, the child born as a result of this intercourse will be cross-eyed. This interpretation is confirmed by the next account narrated by Al-Wahidi in his classic work “Asbab al-Nuzul”, see:

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Khashshab informed us .... : “The Jews used to say: 'Whoever penetrates his wife from a back position, the child born to them as a result of this intercourse would be born cross-eyed'. .. Allah .. revealed therefore ... Your women are a tilth for you so go to your tilth as ye will... ] because it is in the tilth that the child will grow and it is from there that it will come out” .... [24](#)

The verse concludes with two reminders to the husband. First, in saying “provide something for your souls” , it reminds husbands that a “spiritual relationship between a man and a woman is postulated as the indispensable basis of sexual relations” [25](#) , recognizing that in order to have a healthy sexual relationship, there must first be a spiritual bond between the two people. Other scholars have translated and interpreted this part of the verse different. Omar Naseef points out:

Some scholars.. translated the final part .. as ‘and provide for them before yourselves’ , which they interpreted to mean that a husband should ensure that his wife is sexually satisfied before he satisfies himself .. [26](#)

Second, the verse reminds husbands to “remain conscious of Allah, and know that you are destined to meet Him”. This part of the verse tells the husband that he will be held accountable for his actions before Allah. The verse reminds him that he should act kindly towards his wife when he is having sexual relationships with her. He should not abuse his physical strength against her or harm her in any way. [27](#) In other words marital rape is forbidden. A husband should fear Allah.

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[24](#): Al-Wahidi, “Asbab al-nuzul” [ Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, n.d. ], p. 51

[25](#): Muhammad Asad, “The Message of the Qur’an” [ The Book Foundation, 2003 ], Vol. 1, p. 60

[26](#): Naseef, “Liberation Theology: Islam and the Feminist Agenda in the Qur’an” [ Authorhouse 2007 ] p. 202

[27](#): This law is also derived from the hadith: “there shall be no infliction of harm on oneself or others” [ Ibn Maajah 2340 , classed as saheeh by Shayk al-Albaani in Irwa’ al-Ghaleel 896 ]. The hadith in question forbids a husband to harm his wife physical and emotional. Therefore all manners of sexual intercourse that might or do harm the wife are forbidden by the words of the Prophet [ saaw ] narrated in this hadith.

## Rebuttal:

One Christian missionary argued:

The reason why this verse was "revealed" is given in the Sunan Abu Dawud "... Narrated Abdullah Ibn Abbas: Ibn Umar misunderstood [ "So come to your tilth however you will" ] - may Allah forgive him. The fact is that this clan of the Ansar, who were idolaters, lived in the company of the Jews who were the people of the Book. They [ the Ansar ] accepted their superiority over themselves in respect of knowledge, and they followed most of their actions. The people of the Book [ i.e. the Jews ] used to have intercourse with their women on one side alone [ i.e. lying on their backs ]. This was the most concealing position for [ the vagina of ] the women. This clan of the Ansar adopted this practice from them. But this tribe of the Quraysh used to uncover their women completely, and seek pleasure with them from in front and behind and laying them on their backs. When the immigrants came to Medina, a man married a woman of the Ansar. He began to do the same kind of action with her, but she disliked it, and said to him: We were approached on one side [ i.e. lying on the back ] ; do it so, otherwise keep away from me. This matter of theirs spread widely, and it reached the Apostle of Allah So Allah, the Exalted, sent down the Qur'anic verse: "Your wives are a tilth to you, so come to your tilth however you will," i.e. from in front, from behind or lying on the back. But this verse meant the place of the delivery of the child, i.e. the vagina..." [ Sunan Abu Dawud Number 2159 ]. Instead of respecting the woman's refusal to engage in a particular sexual position, Allah sends down the command permitting men to enter women as they like !

In order to understand the hadith cited by the Christian missionary fully one needs to look at the other narrations related to this topic. In "Asbab al-Nuzul" for example we read a hadith that attributes to Ibn Abbas a similar comment but with a slightly different wording. The hadith reads:

Mujahid...said: "I read the Qur'an out of memory, from beginning to end, under Ibn 'Abbas' supervision three times, stopping at each verse to ask him about its meaning until he got to this verse [ Your women are as a tilth unto you.. ]. He said: 'The men of this part of Quraysh used to have sexual intercourse with their wives while the latter lay down on their front. They enjoyed their wives from the front and back positions. When they migrated to Medina and married the women of the Helpers, they tried to do with them what they were in the habit of doing in Mecca. But the women of the Helpers objected, saying: "This is something that we did not do before". The talk spread until it reached the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace. Allah, exalted is He, then revealed [ Your women are as a tilth unto you so go to your tilth as ye will ]. He said: If you want you can penetrate your wives from a back position or from a front position, or if you want from a kneeling down position. He meant by this, penetrating their women's vaginas from any of these positions. He said: go to your tilth as you will". [28](#)

From the wording narrated in the last hadith we can see that it was not just one Ansari woman who objected to have sex with her husband in a non-missionary position but a group of them. Another hadith confirm this. [29](#) Now that we have clarified this issue we can take a look at the rest of the hadith attributed to Ibn Abbas. What we first notice is that the hadith lacks details. For example we do not read why the Ansar [ the Helpers ] and the Jews condemned the act of having vaginal intercourse with one's wife from behind. In other words the hadith does not tell us the main reason why the women of the Ansar refused to have sex with their husbands [ the Emigrants ] in a non-missionary position. The cause for their dispute with their husbands [ the Emigrants ] over the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position is not given. Nor does the hadith

[28](#): Al-Wahidi, "Asbab al-nuzul" [ Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, n.d. ], p. 52

[29](#): See: An-Nasa'i in "Al-Kubra" 5:315 ; Tafsir Ibn Kathir, vol. 1, Darussalam 2000, p. 621

tell us “how” their talk spread and reached the Messenger of Allah. The answers to these questions are given in another narration that is also attributed to Abdullah Ibn Abbas. The hadith reads:

Ibn 'Abbas said: “This [ ayah ] was revealed about the Emigrants after they settled in Medina. They mentioned having sex with their wives from the front and back positions and did not see any harm in doing so as long as the penetration was done in the women's sexual organ. The Ansar and Jews who were present condemned this and mentioned that the *only lawful* way of sleeping with one's wife is to do it from the front position. The Jews also mentioned that they find in the Torah that it is filth in the sight of Allah to sleep with one's wife in any other position than when the wife is lying on her back, and failing to do so is the cause why children are born cross-eyed or mentally disturbed. The Muslims mentioned this to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, saying: 'In the pre-Islamic period and after we embraced Islam we always had sex with our wives in any position we liked. The Jews have condemned us for doing so and, further, claimed this and that'. And so Allah, exalted is He, gave the lie to the Jews and revealed this verse to give dispensation [ ... so go to your *tilth* as ye will ]. He says: the sexual organ of the wife is the plantation where the child grows [ so go to your *tilth* as ye will ], meaning: from in front of her and from behind her as long as the penetration is done in her sexual organ [30](#)

More details are given in the next hadith:

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Khashshab informed us .... : “The Jews used to say: 'Whoever penetrates his wife from a back position, the child born to them as a result of this intercourse would be born cross-eyed'. Because of this, the women of the Helpers did not let their husbands penetrate them from a back position. A group of them went to see the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, and asked him about having sex with their wives while in their period of menstruation and also about the claim of the Jews. Allah, glorious and exalted is He, revealed therefore [ They question thee ( O Muhammad ) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves... ] , i.e. by performing a major ritual ablution [ And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you ] i.e. from the front [ Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness. Your women are a *tilth* for you ( to cultivate ) so go to your *tilth* as ye will... ] because it is in the *tilth* that the child will grow and it is from there that it will come out” .... [31](#)

One can reconcile all these different narrations in the next way. First there is this debate between some of the women of the Ansar [ the Helpers ] and their husbands [ the Emigrants ] about the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position. The women of the Ansar refused to have sex in a non-missionary position since the Jews used to tell them that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would be born with a squint. In addition they were told by the Jews that having sex in a non-missionary position is filth in the sight of Allah. In other words the women of the Ansar [ the Helpers ] viewed sex in a non-missionary position as something impermissible due to Jewish myths. The debate between the women of the Ansar and their husbands [ the Emigrants ] later on became known to more people [ some couples probably told their friends or family about their disagreement or debate on the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position ]. As a result of this various groups of people started to debate this topic. Some men from among the Emigrants mentioned that they had sex with their wives in a non-missionary position and did not see any harm in doing so as long as the act was done in the women's sexual organ. The Jews condemned them for this practice. The Jews said: “..If a man has sex with his wife when she is in a kneeling down position, any child born as a result of this

[30](#): Al-Wahidi, “Asbab al-nuzul” [ Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, n.d. ], p. 54

[31](#): Al-Wahidi, “Asbab al-nuzul” [ Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, n.d. ], p. 51

intercourse will be cross-eyed..". The Ansar followed the opinion of the Jews. They too believed that the Emigrants were doing something that was impermissible. In order to end the dispute some Muslims went to Prophet and informed him about the debate that was going on. Abdullah Ibn Abbas refers to this with his comment "...the talk [ the debate on the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position ] spread until it reached the Messenger of Allah.." [ Asbab al-Nuzul p. 52 ]. Once the Messenger of Allah was informed about the debate that was going on and the claims made by the Jews, Allah revealed: "...Your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God..." [ 2:223 ]. Allah revealed this verse to demonstrate that having sex in any position is "lawful" and does not cause birth defects as the Jews claimed. Another hadith however seems to contradict this scenario and gives the impression that verse was revealed on another occasion. The hadith reads:

From Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet, who reported: A man married an Ansari woman and wanted to have vaginal intercourse with her from behind. The [ Ansari ] woman refused, saying: "Not until I ask the Messenger of God". Umm Salama said: So she came and told me about it. <sup>31</sup> I informed the Messenger of God, who said: "Summon her". When she arrived the Messenger of God recited to her "*Your wives are as a tilth unto you...*" [ he added ] : "One orifice only, one orifice only [ the vagina ]" <sup>32</sup>

A careful study of this hadith however tells us that the verse was not revealed on this occasion. The hadith only tells us that the Messenger of Allah in response to her question recited to her the verse "...your wives are as a tilth unto you; so come unto your tilth as ye like.." [ 2:223 ]. The hadith doesn't say that the verse was revealed at that moment. It says that the Prophet recited it to her at that moment. There is a difference between "reciting an ayah" and "the ayah being revealed." It is therefore incorrect to claim that the verse [ ayah ] was revealed in response to the question of the Ansari woman. The verse may have been revealed earlier. The other narrations we cited before actually confirm that the verse was revealed on another occasion [ see Asbab al-Nuzul, 52-54 ]. In addition it is interesting to note that al-Wahidi in his classic work "Asbab al-Nuzul" [ Occasions of Revelation ] did not narrate this hadith about the Ansari woman. This seems to suggest that he was also of the opinion that the verse was not revealed in response to the question of the Ansari woman. Further the fact that the verse opens with the words "*your wives*" confirms that the verse was revealed in response to questions posed by men to the Prophet. In other words the text of the verse itself cancels out the view that the verse was revealed in response to the question of the Ansari woman. It is very likely that the Ansari woman and her husband did not know about the verse discussed in this paperwork. It is possible that no one had informed them about it. Or maybe they both forgot about this verse after they got married to each other after its revelation. Whatever the case may be, the Ansari woman went to visit the house of the Prophet in order to get an answer to her question about the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position [ and probably also about the claims made by the Jews ]. The Prophet answered her question by reciting to her the verse "*your wives are as a tilth unto you; so come unto your tilth as ye like..*" [ a verse that had been revealed to him earlier in response to similar questions asked by men ]. The Prophet recited this verse to her in order to demonstrate that she and her husband were allowed to have sex in any position they liked. <sup>33</sup> She did not have to worry about the claims made by the Jews. Further he

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**31:** In another version the text indicates she asked Umm Salama to put her question to the Prophet. From this it is obvious that she badly wanted to receive an answer from the Prophet himself. This might be the reason why Umm Salama did not answer the question herself, but kept silent on it until the Prophet arrived.

**32:** Tabari 2:538-9, see also Musnad Ahmad 6:305

**33:** One should note that after the Prophet recited this verse to the woman he did not say to her anything like "submit to your husband's wish to have vaginal intercourse with you from behind". The Prophet only recited this verse to her in order to demonstrate that it was lawful for a couple to have sex in various positions, since the woman believed [ due to Jewish myths ] that vaginal intercourse from behind was impermissible and caused children to be born cross-eyed. It is therefore incorrect to think or claim that the verse only gives to men the right of decision regarding sexual positions. Not a single hadith related to this verse supports such a view. For more info related to this topic see p. 4 of this article.

told her that only anal sex was haram. Therefore this hadith does not contradict our given scenario that the verse was revealed earlier in response to questions posed by men to the Prophet about the permissibility of having sex in a non-missionary position and the claims made by the Jews. Scholars like Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlwi and Shayk Ibn Taymiyyah confirm this. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote:

it is narrated in al-Saheehayn that the Jews used to say that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would be born with a squint. The Muslims asked the Prophet [ peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him ] about that, then this verse was revealed: "...Your wives are your tith; go, then, unto your tith as you may desire, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God, and know that you are destined to meet Him.." [ al-Baqara 2:223 ] [31](#)

Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlwi wrote:

The Jews had unnecessarily restricted *the postures of sexual intercourse* without any divine authority. The Ansar [ of Madinah ] being their friends, followed their practice and used to say, 'If a man has intercourse with his wife through the vagina while he is on her back, the child will have a squint.' Thus the verse, "So go in to your tillage as you will" was revealed; that is, it is immaterial whether the husband is on top of his wife or on her back as long as intercourse is through the vagina, which constitutes the tillage. This is so because these matters have nothing to do with religious or social policy but are entirely a matter of personal taste. Such sayings were among the absurdities of the Jews and Allah Ta'ala abolished them. [32](#)

As one can clearly see the verse was not revealed in response to a woman's refusal to have sex with her husband in a non-missionary position. Nor did Allah intend by this verse to give to men alone the right of decision regarding sexual positions. The story behind the revelation of this verse clearly tells us that Allah revealed this verse in order to demonstrate that having sex any position one likes is "*lawful*" and does not cause birth defects as the Jews claimed. The words "so come unto your tith as ye like" were revealed to affirm the freedom of ways to carry out sexual activity. In addition numerous authentic hadith [33](#) confirm that Allah revealed this verse in order to refute the claims made by the Jews. It is therefore absurd for the Christian missionary to cite one hadith and isolate it from all the other narrations related to this topic, and misinterpretate its text in order to claim that Allah denied women any rights in regards to sexual intercourse, or that Allah revealed this verse in order to tell a woman that she had to submit to her husband's wish to have vaginal intercourse with her from behind. Such claims are proven wrong by the story behind the revelation of the verse, and the hadith in Muslim which confirms that the verse was revealed to refute the claim of the Jews that vaginal intercourse from behind causes children to be born cross-eyed, see:

Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allaah said: The Jews used to say that if a man had intercourse with his wife in her vagina from behind, the child would have a squint. Then this aayah was revealed: "...Your wives are as a tith unto you ; so come unto your tith as ye like.." [ 2:223 ]. The Messenger of Allaah [ peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him ] said: "From the front or from the back, so long as it is in the vagina." [34](#)

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[31](#): Shayk Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 32/267

[32](#): Imam Shah Waliullah Dehlwi, "Hujjat Allah al-Baligah", Vol. 2, p. 134

[33](#): See: Abu Dawood 2163, al-Bukhaari 8/154

[34](#): Muslim 1435. Notice also that according to this hadith Jaabir ibn Abd-Allah heard the Prophet explaining the verse after its revelation, which indicates that he was present on the occasion of revelation. This also disproves the view that the verse was revealed in response to the private question of the Ansari woman.

## Biblical Metaphors

The ayah “your wives are as a tilth unto you ; so come unto your tilth as ye like” is always cited by Christian missionaries as “so called evidence” for their claim that the Qur’an insults women and equates them with property. This claim however has been refuted in this paperwork. Earlier we demonstrated that the word “tilth” in this ayah is a metonymy for the vulva of women. In other words the “vagina” of a woman is likened to a “tilth”, not the woman herself as a person ! In the Bible on the other hand the woman as a person is likened to a “vineyard”. In the Psalms we read:

Blessed are all who fear Yhwh, who walks in his ways. You will indeed eat the fruits of your labor ; you will be happy and all will go well for you. Your *wife* will be like a *fertile vineyard* in the corner [34](#) of your house ; your sons will be like olive trees around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears Yhwh [35](#)

Marc Zvi Brettler comments on this passage:

Verse 3 is the most important verse of the psalm in terms of gender issues. It reads ..‘your wife will be like a fertile vineyard in the corner of your house ; your children will be like olive suckers [ = young olive trees ] around your table’. Given the importance of the vineyard, grapes and wine within ancient Israelite society, this verse might seem to present a positive image of the wife. However, it is immediately evident that the woman is contrasted to the children ; she is peripheralized, in the corner [ *yěrekah* ] of the house, while the man’s children are with their father around *his* table. Furthermore, the agricultural imagery used of the woman follows clearly from that used in v.2 ; in the same way that the man owns fields, which he tends with the hope that they will produce food for consumption, he also owns a wife, here represented by simile as a vineyard ; he hopes she too will be fertile. The image of the wife as the husband’s fertile vineyard fits a predominant biblical view of a man’s wife, who is chattel when it comes to the issue of the husband’s ownership of his wife sexuality ... The woman in this verse is in some sense dehumanized through the simile of the fertile vineyard...the woman as ‘gephen’ [ vineyard ] is an object, significant for what she produces, but not valued here for her intrinsic human qualities. In PS. 128.3, the male values the wife’s importance for procreation...Finally, the vine *itself* is not considered useful within the Hebrew Bible, as is made very clear in the extended image of Ezekiel 15, where the prophet compares the destiny of the inhabitants of Jerusalem to *the vine itself, which is worthless*, and easily consumed ; it is only the product of the vine, the grapes that symbolize the children, that are desirable. [36](#)

[34:](#) [kk](#) Marc Zvi Brettler points out: “...Scholars .. try to deproblematicize the text. One way this is typically done [kk](#) is by interpreting *yěrekah* in some way other than ‘corner’. Among the newer translations, the NRSV, REB [kk](#) and NAB all translate our psalm’s *yěrekah bayith* as ‘within your house / home’. Yet in all cases in the [kk](#) Hebrew Bible *yěrekah* suggests an extremity, far away from the speaker... In addition to Psalm 128, the [kk](#) phrase *yěrekah bayith* is also found in Amos 6.10 , in a context that clearly suggests a place deep inside the [kk](#) house. There, the correct understanding of *yěrekah bayith* is picked up by most commentators and [kk](#) translators ; for example, the NRSV translates ‘in the innermost points of the house’ and the REB reads ‘in [kk](#) the corner of the house’. The older NEB offers a particularly ‘interesting’ distinction in its translation [kk](#) of *yěrekah bayith* ; in Amos it means ‘in a corner of the house’ , while in Psalm 128 it is rendered ‘in the [kk](#) heart of your house’ ! The translators’ inconsistency is quite surprising, and seems to result from their [kk](#) unwillingness to admit the psalm’s peripheralization of women. The English Bible reader is thus protected [kk](#) from yet another problematic biblical text.” [ Source: Marc Zvi Brettler, “Women and Psalms: Toward an [kk](#) Understanding of the role of women’s prayer in the Israelite Cult” in: ‘Gender and Law in the Hebrew [kk](#) Bible and the Ancient Near East’ , Continuum International Publishing Group 2004 , p. 35 ].

[35:](#) Pslam 128:1-4

[36:](#) Marc Zvi Brettler, “Women and Psalms: Toward an Understanding of the role of women’s prayer in the Israelite Cult” in: ‘Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East’ , edited by Victor H. Matthews, Levinson, Tikva Frymer-Kensky [ Continuum International Publishing Group 2004 ] p.29-31

Another important point that is often overlooked by many Christians is that these verses do not compare the wife to a *vineyard* alone, but specifically to a “*vineyard in the corner of one’s house*”. Why is the wife likened to a “*vineyard in the corner of one’s house*”? Rabbi David Kimhin explains why:

he compares her to a vine, which some people plant inside their house. As it begins to grow, it is led through an aperture in the house into the sunlight so that its root is inside the house, whilst the branches are outside. So should a woman be chaste, remaining within the house and not going forth from the home. For such is the way of a lewd woman, just as Solomon said of her “Now she is in the street, now in the market” [ Prov. Vii 12 ]. He states [ specifically ] *within* : that is, even in her home she is to be chaste and is not to sit at the door of her house to be seen by those who pass to and fro. For such is the way of the evil woman, just as it says of her “she sits at the door of her house” [ Prov. Ix 14 ]. She should always be *within* the house so that none may see her except her husband and the members of the household. But her children should go forth into the world to their work and for the necessities of the home, just as the branches of the vine shoot forth fruitful and numerous “with the choicest fruits of the sum” [ Deut. xxxiii 14 ]. And if your wife is of this disposition, then your children will be like olive shoots..Such plants are *goodly* [37](#)

Marc Zvi Brettler adds:

the wife is peripheral ...she is in the corner, and to varying extents, dehumanized. In his description of women, the psalmist is mirroring one well-known set of gender roles within ancient Israel ... Thus Psalm 128 may be viewed as typical of the attitude toward women found in Psalms. In sum, this psalm is a previously unexplored, but “useful piece of evidence concerning the attitude toward women” .... [38](#)

In another mysterious biblical passage the wife is again likened to a vineyard. In the Book of Isaiah the poet uses the metaphor of Judah as Yahweh’s “unfaithful wife” [ his vineyard ]. The poet sings:

#### Isaiah 5:1-7

I will sing for the one I love a song about *his vineyard*: My loved one had a *vineyard* on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and *my vineyard*. What more could have been done for *my vineyard* than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to *my vineyard*: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. The *vineyard* of the Lord Almighty is the “house of Israel”, and the “people of Judah” are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

[37](#): Joshua Baker and Ernest W. Nicholson, “The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi on Psalms CXX-Cl” [ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973 ], p. 30 [ Hebrew text ] and p. 31 [ English translation ].

[38](#): Marc Zvi Brettler, “Women and Psalms: Toward an Understanding of the role of women’s prayer in the Israelite Cult” in: ‘Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East’, edited by Victor H. Matthews, Levinson, Tikva Frymer-Kensky [ Continuum International Publishing Group 2004 ] p.33-35

the *vineyard* here is to be understood not literally but rather as a figure for the “female lover” .... The description of the location of the *vineyard* and of the care that it received from the husbandman [ vv. 1b-2b ] implies a matrimonial relationship in which the husband admirably provided for his wife. The expectation of grapes [ v. 2c ], perhaps a symbol of children, was fully justified, and the final word of the verse , *be’usim* , “stinking grapes” , perhaps representing illegitimate children, comes as a great surprise. One expects rather a synonym of ‘*anabim*, “grapes” . ...it begins to appear that the purpose of the song is not to praise the groom but to lay the foundation for a complaint against his wife....the first person suffixes in the phrase *beni uben karmi* , “between me and my vineyard”, reveal that the matrimonial problems are not those of a friend, but the poet’s own. The friend is really the minstrel himself. He has been building a case as is done in the civil court, and now he pleads with the Judahite audience to pass judgement on his wife. One supposes that the Judahites agree to the *wife’s* guilt, for the poet proceeds to announce her punishment in v.5. The removal of the hedge and / or wall and the destruction of the vineyard through the grazing and trampling of animals suggest that the poet will cease to help his wife. More specifically, he will cease to protect her from those who might take advantage of her. The chaos in the vineyard [ v. 6a ] perhaps represents the problems which will engulf her. The curse of drought [ v. 6b ; cf. 2 Sam. i 21 ] may represent a curse of barrenness, the opposite of the wedding blessing of Gen. xxiv 60...Once the Judahites have agreed to the *guilt* and *punishment* of the *adulteress*, the real meaning of the song is revealed to them. The owner of the vineyard is neither the poet nor his [ human ] friend, but Yahweh....However, the most unpleasant surprise of all is now ready to be revealed. The phrase “the men of Judah” [ v. 7 ] creates an expectation of antithetical parallelism. Israel was to be punished, but Judah would be blessed [ cf. Hos. I 7, xii 1 ]. However, the parallelism is synonymous. Suddenly the awful truth is revealed. The disappointing *vineyard*, the *unfaithful wife*, “the house of Israel” – all refer to Judah. The song of the *Vineyard* has turned out to be juridical parable, by means of which the poet has led Judah’s citizens to condemn themselves. The reason for Judah’s condemnation is explained in the final line of the poem. Here one discovers that the good grapes symbolize social justice ; and the stinking grapes, violence and oppression. Judah had produced the opposite of what God had expected... The song has ended...it is clear that the friend is Yahweh... The poet sings on Yahweh’s behalf... The *vineyard*, of course, represents Judah, but indirectly as well as directly ; i.e. the *vineyard* itself is a symbol of Judah, but also is the *wife* whom the *vineyard* imagery evokes. The metaphor of Judah as Yahweh’s wife recalls the covenant that the Lord has made with his people [ cf. Hos. 1 9-ii 4 ; Ezek. Xvi 8, 59-60 ; Mal. 11 14 ] .. The removal of the wall or hedge [ v. 5 ] implies that Judah will no longer enjoy divine protection. The devouring [ *ba’er* ] and trampling [ *mirmas* ] refer to enemy invasions ...The threat of military invasion and the imagery here used to convey that threat call to mind the “covenant curses” [ cf. Lev. xxvi 16-17 , 25, 31-36 ; Deut. xxviii 30, 33, 38-42 ]. The curse of drought may also be regarded as a covenant curse [ cf. Lev. xxvi 19 ; Deut. xxviii 23-24 ]. These allusions to the “covenant curses”, the use of the *husband-wife imagery*, and the symbolic recital of the mighty acts of God [ vv. 1b-2 ] lead the interpreter to view the periscope as a sort of covenant lawsuit. [39](#)

In the metaphor discussed above the “Biblical God” describes or views his wife as *his vineyard*. She is his possession. Christian missionaries of course do not mention these biblical facts, since they do not suit their evangelical agenda. Their goal mainly is to *distort* quranic verses and hadith in order to mislead people. Earlier in this paperwork we refuted their claim that the quranic ayah “...your wives are as a tilth unto you..” insults women or equates them with property. We demonstrated that the word *tilth* in this ayah is a metonymy for the vulva of women. In other words only the vulva of a woman is likened to a “tilth” here , not the woman herself as a person ! In the Bible on the other hand the woman as a person is likened to a *vineyard*. Why do these Christian missionaries not condemn their own Bible for this ? Why do they hide these passages ? The double standards of these people are truly amazing. The fact is, it is not the Qur’an that insults women, but the Bible. [40](#)

[39](#): Gary Roye Williams, “Frustrated Expectations in Isaiah V 1-7: A Literary Interpretation” in: ‘Vetus Testamentum’, Volume 35, Number 4 [ 1985 ], pp. 460-464

[40](#): In the Bible for example women are seen as the cause for men’s unclean state. One poet wrote: “..How then can man be justified with God ? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman ? ..” [ Job 25:4 ].