OCTOBER 4, 2009 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

ENGAGING WITH IRAN IS LIKE HAVING SEX WITH SOMEONE WHO HATES YOU

(BY CHRISTOPER HITCHENS)

"LIVING IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC," WROTE AZAR NAFISI IN HER BOOK READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN IN 2003, "IS LIKE HAVING SEX WITH A MAN YOU LOATHE." THIS VERDICT HAS GATHERED EXTRA FORCE AND PUNGENCY AS THE SUCCEEDING YEARS HAVE ELAPSED AND AS MORE WOMEN HAVE BEEN STONED, HANGED, BEATEN, RAPED, AND SILENCED. LATELY HAS COME THE NEWS THAT IRANIAN MEN IN PRISON ARE BEING RAPED, TOO, FOR TRYING TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE. AND NOW THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS COME TO A POINT WHERE IT MUST ASK ITSELF: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO ENTER NEGOTIATIONS WITH A MAN WHO LOATHES YOU AND WHO EVERY FRIDAY HOLDS PUBLIC PRAYERS THAT CALL FOR YOUR DEATH?

LAST FRIDAY BROUGHT THE NEWS THAT THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION HAD ACCEPTED AN OFFER FROM TEHRAN, DELIVERED THE PRECEDING WEDNESDAY, FOR THE HOLDING OF WHAT THE NEW YORK TIMES CALLED "UNCONDITIONAL TALKS." IT WAS FURTHER REPORTED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD SPENT "LESS THAN 48 HOURS" DELIBERATING WHETHER TO RESPOND TO THE INVITATION, WHICH YIELDS THE INTERESTING IF MINOR DETAIL THAT THIS MUST HAVE BEEN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DECISION TAKEN BY OBAMA'S PEOPLE ON OR ABOUT THE EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATTACKS OF SEPT. 11.

A COUPLE OF WEEKS AFTER THE JUNE 12 ELECTION, BENJAMIN WEINTHAL SUGGESTED SIX WAYS PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA COULD INFLUENCE IRAN. IN AUGUST, AN UNDERCOVER JOURNALIST REPORTED ON THE MOOD IN TEHRAN. CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS REMINDED US OF WHY WE'RE IN A WAR AGAINST ISLAMIC TERRORISM.WELL, I AM ALL FOR TALKS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS, AND I HAVE SAID SEVERAL TIMES IN THIS SPACE THAT I THINK WE SHOULD OFFER THE IRANIANS COOPERATION ON A WIDE SPECTRUM OF TOPICS, ESPECIALLY THE VERY PRESSING ONE OF HELPING TO "PROOF" IRAN AGAINST THE COMING EARTHQUAKE THAT COULD DEVASTATE ITS CAPITAL CITY. THERE MAY EVEN BE AREAS OF POTENTIAL INTEREST IN OUR HAVING COMMON ENEMIES IN THE TALIBAN AND AL-QAIDA. BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED A LITTLE SINCE THE PRESIDENT AND HIS SECRETARY OF STATE WERE SPARRING OVER THE WORD UNCONDITIONAL DURING THE PRIMARIES. FIRST, IT HAS BECOME EVER CLEARER THAT IRAN'S URANIUM-ENRICHMENT AND CENTRIFUGE PROGRAM HAS PUT IT WITHIN MEASURABLE DISTANCE OF THE ABILITY TO WEAPONIZE ITS NUCLEAR CAPACITY. SECOND, IT HAS BECOME OBSCENELY OBVIOUS THAT THE THEOCRACY IS PREPARED TO GOVERN BY FORCE ALONE AND TO EMPLOY THE MOST APPALLING MEASURES TO REMAIN IN POWER WITHOUT A MANDATE.

IT WOULD BE NICE TO KNOW, EVEN IF NO "CONDITIONS" OR "PRECONDITIONS" (THIS SEEMS LIKE A DISTINCTION WITHOUT MUCH DIFFERENCE) ARE TO BE EXACTED, WHETHER THE ADMINISTRATION HAS ASSURED ITSELF ON TWO POINTS. THE FIRST OF THESE IS: DO WE SERIOUSLY EXPECT THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC TO BE NEGOTIATING IN GOOD FAITH ABOUT ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM? AND THE SECOND IS: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EFFECT OF THESE PROPOSED TALKS ON THE MORALE AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE IRANIAN OPPOSITION?

ONE PRESUMES THAT THE MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD REGIME HAD ITS OWN REASONS FOR FIRING OFF A FIVE-PAGE DOCUMENT PROPOSING NEGOTIATIONS AND INCLUDING BRITAIN, FRANCE, RUSSIA, GERMANY, AND CHINA—THE MUCH-STALLED GROUP OF COUNTRIES THAT HAVE CONDUCTED BUSINESS WITH IRAN SO FAR—IN THE OFFER. THE LETTER WAS SENT OUT IN THE SAME PERIOD THAT THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT OPPOSED ANY FURTHER SANCTIONS ON IRAN FOR NONCOOPERATION, IN THE SAME PERIOD THAT AHMADINEJAD ANNOUNCED THAT IRAN WOULD NEVER HALT ITS NUCLEAR FUEL PRODUCTION, AND IN THE RUN-UP TO AHMADINEJAD'S NEXT APPEARANCE AT THE PODIUM OF THE UNITED NATIONS TOWARD THE END OF THIS MONTH.

MIGHT IT BE POSSIBLE—YOU WILL, I HOPE, FORGIVE MY CYNICISM—THAT THIS LATEST INITIATIVE FROM TEHRAN IS YET ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO BUY TIME OR RUN OUT THE CLOCK?

MEANWHILE, IT IS CERTAINLY THE CASE THAT AT LEAST THREE OF THE SIX COUNTRIES APPROACHED ARE BEING ASKED TO NEGOTIATE UNDER SOME KIND OF DURESS. IN AN UNPARDONABLE VIOLATION OF DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY (A PHRASE THAT MAY REMIND YOU OF SOMETHING), EMPLOYEES OF THE FRENCH AND BRITISH EMBASSIES IN TEHRAN HAVE BEEN PLACED UNDER ARREST AND SUBJECTED TO SHOW TRIALS SINCE THE CONVULSIONS THAT ATTENDED THE COUP MOUNTED BY THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS IN JUNE. AND THE IRANIAN CORRESPONDENT OF NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE—WHO IS ALSO A CANADIAN CITIZEN—HAS BEEN HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR ALMOST THE SAME LENGTH OF TIME. WITHOUT OVERSTRESSING ANY "PRECONDITIONS," IT DOESN'T SEEM TOO MUCH TO REQUIRE OF THE IRANIAN REGIME THAT IT NOT SEND OUT INVITATIONS TO COUNTRIES WHOSE CITIZENS OR LOCALLY ENGAGED DIPLOMATIC STAFF IT IS HOLDING AS HOSTAGES.

ON THE LARGER QUESTION OF THE BREACH BY IRAN OF ALL ITS UNDERTAKINGS ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND THE AMAZING ABSENCE FROM ITS DIPLOMATIC NOTE OF ANY MENTION OF ITS OWN PROGRAM, ONE WASN'T TOO REASSURED BY THE LAZY PHRASING OF SUSAN RICE, THE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS. THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION, SHE SAID, WOULD NOT IMPOSE "ARTIFICIAL DEADLINES" ON AHMADINEJAD. WHY IS THIS NOT REASSURING? BECAUSE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL WHAT IS MEANT BY AN "ARTIFICIAL DEADLINE." WOULD ONE PREFER A "GENUINE" DEADLINE, WHEREBY, FOR EXAMPLE, THE UNITED NATIONS REQUIRED IRAN TO DEMONSTRATE COMPLIANCE WITH THE RELEVANT SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS ON NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION—WE HAVE A BUSHEL OF THESE—OR FACE FURTHER U.N.-MANDATED SANCTIONS? CERTAINLY ONE WOULD, BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT AMBASSADOR RICE APPEARS TO HAVE MEANT.

FROM ALL APPEARANCES, THEN, THIS SEEMS LIKE ANOTHER SNOW JOB FROM THE MULLAHS. AND DID THE STATE DEPARTMENT OR THE CIA TAKE ANY SOUNDINGS, IN THOSE 48 HOURS BETWEEN RECEIPT OF THE MULLAHS' LETTER AND OUR RESPONSE TO IT, AMONG THE LEADERS OF IRANIAN CIVIL SOCIETY? GIVEN THE SHORT INTERVAL, IT SEEMS THAT THE THOUGHT DID NOT EVEN OCCUR TO THEM. HERE IS WHAT I HEARD FROM PROFESSOR ABBAS MILANI, THE DIRECTOR OF IRANIAN STUDIES AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY:

WHEN YOU READ [THE IRANIAN LETTER] AND REALIZE HOW EMPTY OF EARNEST NEGOTIATING POSITIONS IT IN FACT IS, YOU ARE LEFT WITH NO CHOICE BUT TO CONCLUDE THAT THEY ARE RELYING ON THEIR ALLY IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA TO VETO ANY RESOLUTIONS AGAINST THEM. FOR THE RUSSIANS TO BE ABLE TO EVEN PRETEND TO BE SERIOUS IN THEIR TALK OF NO NEED FOR MORE PRESSURE ON THE REGIME, TEHRAN HAS ALSO TO PRETEND TO BE SERIOUS IN NEGOTIATION.

THIS ANALYSIS APPEARS TO CONFORM TO ALL THE AVAILABLE FACTS AS WE KNOW THEM. A BIT TOO MUCH LIKE HAVING SEX WITH SOMEONE WHO LOATHES YOU.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

VAMPIRES

A VAMPIRE IS A MYTHICAL CREATURE WHO OVERCOMES DEATH BY SUCKING THE BLOOD FROM LIVING HUMANS. THE MOST COMMON VARIATION OF THE MYTH PORTRAYS THE VAMPIRE AS A DEAD PERSON WHO RISES FROM THE GRAVE AT NIGHT TO SEEK HIS VICTIM FROM THE REALM OF THE SLEEPING. THE VAMPIRE IS A POPULAR THEME OF FILM MAKERS WHO HAVE STARTED WITH BRAM STOKERS'S NOVEL (DRACULA) AND ADDED A NUMBER OF VARIATIONS TO THE THEME, E.G., THE ABILITY TO FLY (LIKE THE VAMPIRE BAT); A LUST FOR BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AS VICTIMS WHO THEN BECOME VAMPIRES UPON BEING BITTEN; FEAR OF THE SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTIAN CROSS; THE REPELLING POWER OF GARLIC OR GARLIC FLOWERS; AND DEATH BY SUNLIGHT OR BY A SPECIAL STAKE DRIVEN THROUGH THE HEART, A FITTING DEATH FOR A CHARACTER COMMONLY BELIEVED TO BE BASED ON THE 15TH CENTURY WARRIOR, VLAD THE IMPALER. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO ELIZABETH MILLER, AUTHOR OF DRACULA: SENSE & NONSENSE (DESERT ISLAND BOOKS, 2000), BRAM STOKER DID NOT BASE HIS VAMPIRE COUNT ON VLAD THE IMPALER. HE BORROWED VLAD'S NICKNAME (DRACULA) FOR A VAMPIRE CHARACTER HE HAD ALREADY CONCEIVED (AND TENTATIVELY NAMED COUNT WAMPYR).

LEGENDS OF BLOODSUCKING CREATURES ARE FOUND IN MANY CULTURES THROUGHOUT HISTORY. ONE OF THE MORE POPULAR BLOODSUCKERS OF OUR AGE IS THE CHUPACABRA. THE VAMPIRE IS ALSO A POPULAR LITERARY SUBJECT. HENCE, THERE ARE NUMEROUS DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ORIGIN, NATURE, POWERS, ETC. OF VAMPIRES. WHAT SEEMS TO BE UNIVERSAL ABOUT VAMPIRE MYTHS IS THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE FEAR OF DEATH AND THE DESIRE FOR IMMORTALITY. THE RITUAL DRINKING OF BLOOD TO OVERCOME DEATH HAS BEEN PRACTICED BY MANY PEOPLES. THE AZTECS AND OTHER NATIVE AMERICANS, FOR EXAMPLE, ATE THE HEARTS AND DRANK THE BLOOD OF CAPTIVES IN RITUAL CEREMONIES, MOST LIKELY TO SATISFY THE APPETITE OF THEIR GODS AND GAIN FOR THEMSELVES FERTILITY AND IMMORTALITY. ALSO TYPICAL WERE THE RITES OF DIONYSUS AND MITHRAS, WHERE THE DRINKING OF ANIMAL BLOOD WAS REQUIRED IN THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY. EVEN TODAY, SOME CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT THEIR PRIESTS PERFORM A MAGICAL TRANSUBSTANTIATION OF BREAD AND WINE INTO THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST TO BE EATEN AND DRUNK IN THE QUEST TO JOIN GOD IN ETERNAL LIFE.

WE MIGHT SAY WE'VE MADE PROGRESS IN OUR RITUALISTIC QUEST TO OVERCOME DEATH. FIRST, WE SACRIFICED HUMANS AND DRANK THEIR BLOOD TO KEEP THE GODS ALIVE AND HAPPY, OR TO JOIN THEM IN OVERCOMING DEATH. WE LATER CAME TO SUBSTITUTE BULLS OR OTHER ANIMALS FOR HUMANS TO ACHIEVE OUR GOAL. FINALLY, WE PROGRESSED TO A VEGETARIAN MENU OF BREAD AND WINE. EVEN SO, THE BASIC TRUTH IS DEPRESSING: FOR ANYTHING TO LIVE, SOMETHING OR SOMEONE ELSE MUST DIE. WHETHER THIS TRUTH SETS YOU FREE OR NOT DEPENDS, I SUPPOSE, ON YOUR PLACE AT OR ON THE DINNER TABLE. SINCE WE ARE DEEP INTO METAPHORS, WE MAY AS WELL NOTE HERE THAT THE VAMPIRE HAS BECOME A METAPHOR FOR THOSE WHO DEFINE AND CREATE THEMSELVES BY DESTROYING OTHERS. PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES CENTER ON DESTROYING OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES BY DISEMPOWERING THEM, WHO REDUCE THEIR VICTIMS TO DEPENDENT SUBJECTS TO BE LORDED OVER, HAVE BEEN CALLED SPIRITUAL VAMPIRES. SOME OF THE THERAPISTS, MINISTERS AND GURUS I'VE WRITTEN ABOUT ELSEWHERE IN THE DICTIONARY COULD BE CALLED SPIRITUAL VAMPIRES, VERY APTLY.

THIS CULTURAL LINK BETWEEN VAMPIRISM AND THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SUBORDINATED IN LITERATURE AND FILM, WHERE OTHER THEMES, SUCH AS BLOOD FOR BLOOD'S SAKE, FEAR FOR FEAR'S SAKE, OR ENTRANCE INTO THE REALM OF THE OCCULT, SEEM TO DOMINATE. ONE SIGN OF THE CULTURAL DETERIORATION OF OUR ANCESTOR'S NOBLE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY CAN BE SEEN IN THE MODERN SECONDARY MEANING OF 'VAMPIRE': A WOMAN WHO EXPLOITS AND RUINS HER LOVER. ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF DETERIORATION CAN BE SEEN IN THE NUMEROUS WWW SITES ON VAMPIRES WHICH APPEAL TO OCCULT OR NEW AGE INTERESTS SUCH AS ENTERING THE SO-CALLED DARK SIDE OF REALITY, GAINING POWER, ESTABLISHING A UNIQUE IDENTITY AS A SPECIAL PERSON OR SELLING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS AND GAMES.

APPARENTLY, ROLE PLAYING AND MASQUERADING AS VAMPIRES IS NOT ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE BLOODLUST OF SOME PEOPLE, AND COVENS OR CULTS OF "VAMPIRES" HAVE EMERGED AMONG SOME OCCULTISTS. THEY SEEK BLOOD TO GIVE THEM POWER, A SEXUAL RUSH, OR TO ESTABLISH A UNIQUE AND SPECIAL FICTIONAL PERSONA BASED ON CREATING FEAR AND MYSTERY IN OTHERS. UNLIKE OUR ANCIENT ANCESTORS, THEIR POWER IS NOT SOUGHT BECAUSE OF FEAR BASED ON IGNORANCE AND MISUNDERSTANDING OF NATURE, BUT ON IGNORANCE AND MISUNDERSTANDING OF THEMSELVES. LIKE OTHER OCCULT CULTS THESE VAMPIRE COVENS ARE ATTRACTIVE TO THE YOUNG AND THE WEAK. JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, SUCH "VAMPYRES" WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED ILL OR EVIL. TODAY, THEY ARE SAID TO HAVE AN "ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE." SOME MAY BE MISFITS WHO REALLY BELIEVE THEY CAN DRAW ENERGY FROM EACH OTHER, AND WHO FEEL A SENSE OF SUPERIORITY OVER THOSE WHO AREN'T PART OF THEIR INNER GROUP.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

ABROAD

SCANDINAVIA FIGHTS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

SWEDEN, DENMARK AND NORWAY TRY TO STOP GENITAL MUTILATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN — WHEN SHE WAS 11, A SWEDISH-BORN GIRL WAS TAKEN ON VACATION TO HER MOTHER’S NATIVE SOMALIA. THE MOTHER WANTED TO “MAKE HER DAUGHTER CLEAN” AND PAID A MAN TO CUT OFF HER DAUGHTER’S CLITORIS AND LABIA WHILE TWO WOMEN HELD HER DOWN.

AFTERWARD, THE GIRL WAS STITCHED TO HER URETHRA.

NO ANESTHESIA WAS USED.

LAST YEAR, AT AGE 19, A SWEDISH COURT CONVICTED THE MOTHER FOR THOSE ILLEGAL ACTS, AWARDING THE VICTIM RECORD DEMAGES.

SCANDINAVIANS — RATHER THAN QUIETLY RECOILING AS IMMIGRANT MOTHERS TAKE THEIR EUROPE-BORN DAUGHTERS ON VACATION TO AFRICA BE CIRCUMCISED — ARE FIGHTING THE TRAFFIC IN FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM).

SWEDEN, NORWAY AND DENMARK ARE DOGGEDLY PURSUING PERPETRATORS OF FGM, PRACTICED BY AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURES. THOSE PERPETRATORS ARE MOSTLY THE IMMIGRANT MOTHERS OF THE YOUNG GIRLS.

JAIL SENTENCES, RECORD DAMAGES AND CONTROVERSIAL IMMIGRATION LAWS ARE SCANDINAVIA’S WEAPONS IN THIS WAR. MEANWHILE AFRICANS — WHO HAVE IMMIGRATED WITH THEIR FAMILIES FOR A BETTER LIFE IN NORTHERN EUROPE — WRING THEIR HANDS, IMPLORING WESTERNERS TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY ARE DOING WHAT THEY THINK IS BEST FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS.

“THE REASONS GIVEN FOR FEMALE CIRCUMCISION ARE TRADITIONAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS. IT IS BELIEVED TO ENCOURAGE CLEANLINESS, TO CONTROL PROMISCUITY, ENHANCE THE MALES’ SEXUAL PLEASURE, PRESERVE VIRGINITY AND PROTECT AGAINST UNWANTED PREGNANCIES,” SAID TIMNIT EMBAYE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM) IN KENYA.

BUT SCANDINAVIAN LEADERS REFUSE TO INTERPRET TOLERANCE OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION AS POLITICALLY CORRECT.

FGM "IS A VERY SERIOUS ASSAULT ON CHILDREN,” SAID NORWAY’S SECRETARY OF JUSTICE KNUT STORBERGET. “IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY WILL BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO VALUE THIS INDEPENDENTLY WHEN THEY ARE OLD ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND.”

IN SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES, FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IS ILLEGAL EVEN IF IT HAPPENS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY AND EVEN IF THE PRACTICE IS LEGAL IN THAT COUNTRY. IT DOES NOT MATTER IF THE VICTIM SAID YES, IT IS STILL ILLEGAL. PERPETRATORS — SUCH AS A GIRL’S PARENTS — ARE BEING PROSECUTED UPON RETURN TO SCANDINAVIA AND FACE UP TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON.

THE GRAPHIC DETAILS REVEALED IN THE ENSUING TRIALS HAVE SHOCKED PEOPLE HERE. YOUNG WOMEN HAVE TOLD HORRIBLE STORIES CONFIRMED BY MEDICAL REPORTS.

IN NORWAY, THE IMMIGRATION APPEALS BOARD HAS ALLOWED AFRICAN FAMILIES TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY EVEN IF THEY DO NOT FULFILL IMMIGRATION CRITERIA. THE BOARD FEARS THAT SENDING FAMILIES BACK TO AFRICA WILL LEAVE THEIR DAUGHTERS VULNERABLE TO CIRCUMCISION. IN 50 CASES OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS REJECTED BY THE NORWEGIAN DIRECTORATE OF IMMIGRATION, APPEALS WERE FILED NOT BY THE FAMILIES AS USUAL, BUT BY THE APPEALS BOARD ITSELF.

“FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING IS A SERIOUS ASSAULT AND CONTRADICTS BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS,” SAID JAN OLAV BARSTAD OF THE APPEALS BOARD.

EARLIER THIS YEAR A DANISH COURT HANDED DOWN THE COUNTRY'S FIRST JAIL SENTENCE FOR CARRYING OUT FEMALE CIRCUMCISION. A 40-YEAR-OLD MOTHER FROM ERITREA, WHERE CIRCUMCISION IS PRACTICED AMONG MORE THAN 98 PERCENT OF THE FEMALE POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO), WAS SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS IN JAIL AFTER FORCING HER TWO DAUGHTERS, 10 AND 12, TO BE CIRCUMCISED ON A TRIP TO SUDAN IN 2003. WHEN THE PARENTS PLANNED ANOTHER TRIP TO SUDAN WITH THEIR 6-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, THE TWO ELDER GIRLS ALERTED OTHER ADULTS. THE POLICE SEIZED THE PARENTS, AND THE SHOCKING STORY TOOK CENTER STAGE IN DANISH MEDIA FOR MONTHS.

THE FATHER CLAIMED HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND WAS ACQUITTED OF ANY CHARGES.

“ALTHOUGH WOMEN ARE OFTEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS, MEMBERS OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY ARE USUALLY INVOLVED IN THE DECISION-MAKING,” SAID MARGARET CHAN, WHO'S DIRECTOR-GENERAL, IN A STATEMENT. “FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IS A MANIFESTATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY. IT REPRESENTS SOCIETY’S CONTROL OVER WOMEN.”

WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM MEN IN SOCIETIES WHERE FGM IS PRACTICED IT WILL NEVER BE STOPPED, EXPERTS SAY.

“THERE IS OFTEN AN EXPECTATION THAT MEN WILL MARRY ONLY CIRCUMCISED WOMEN,” CHAN SAID. “ANYONE DEPARTING FROM THE NORM MAY FACE HARASSMENT AND OSTRACISM.” IN ERITREA, IF A GIRL IS NOT A VIRGIN, SHE WILL BE RETURNED TO HER PARENTS’ HOME AFTER MARRIAGE. CIRCUMCISION IS SEEN AS EVIDENCE THAT A GIRL IS A VIRGIN.

EMBAYE OF IOM, WHO IS ORIGINALLY FROM KENYA WHERE CIRCUMCISION RATES AFFECT ABOUT 32 PERCENT OF THE FEMALE POPULATION, SAID THAT FOR THESE REASONS MOTHERS ARE RELUCTANT TO OBJECT TO THE CIRCUMCISION OF THEIR DAUGHTERS.

“WOMEN IN MOST AFRICAN COMMUNITIES ARE TAKEN AS SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS. ALTHOUGH THE MOTHERS MAY NOT WANT TO CIRCUMCISE THEIR DAUGHTERS, IT IS OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO OPENLY OPPOSE THE PRACTICE,” SHE SAID. “IT WOULD BE A BOLD WOMAN TO STAND UP AGAINST A PRACTICE THAT HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY ALL HER WOMEN ANCESTORS FOR CENTURIES.”

SO SCANDINAVIAN GOVERNMENTS ARE TRYING TO STAND UP FOR THE WOMEN.

THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT HAS LAUNCHED A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TRYING TO STOP FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN SWEDEN, INCLUDING AMONG IMMIGRANTS WITHOUT CITIZENSHIP. IT HAS ALSO MOVED TO SUPPORT GIRLS AND WOMEN IN SWEDEN WHO ALREADY ARE VICTIMS OF CIRCUMCISION. THE ACT DIRECTS SWEDISH SCHOOLS, PRESCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, LOCAL HEALTH CENTERS, SOCIAL SERVICES, POLICE AUTHORITIES AND PROSECUTORS TO UNDERSTAND, PREVENT AND DEAL WITH CIRCUMCISION. POLICE AND PROSECUTORS HAVE ATTENDED REGIONAL CONFERENCES ON HOW TO DO THAT.

A NEW LAW IN NORWAY THAT GOES INTO EFFECT NATIONWIDE JAN. 1 WILL OFFER FREE GENITAL SCREENINGS TO ALL GIRLS EMIGRATING FROM COUNTRIES WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE WOMEN ARE CIRCUMCISED. IF THE OFFER IS NOT ACCEPTED, IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES CAN ALERT THE CHILDREN’S WELFARE INSTITUTION. GIRLS WHO RESIDE IN NORWAY WILL HAVE HEALTH CHECKS IN THE FIFTH AND 10TH GRADES.

“GENITAL CUTTING IS ILLEGAL AND RESULTS IN INCURABLE DAMAGE FOR THE VICTIMS,” SAID NORWAY’S SECRETARY OF HEALTH BJARNE HANSSEN. “THEREFORE, WE LAUNCH THIS ADDITIONAL RULE.”

LAWS REGARDING FEMALE CIRCUMCISION WERE ADOPTED IN SWEDEN IN 1982, IN NORWAY IN 1986 AND IN DENMARK IN 2003. IN THE U.S., IT HAS BEEN A FEDERAL CRIME SINCE 1997 TO CONDUCT FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION ON ANYONE YOUNGER THAN 18.

HOWEVER, IOM BELIEVES APPROACHES MUST BE DELICATE.

“FORCEFUL MEANS — INCLUDING LAWS — WILL NOT BRING ANY SUCCESS," EMBAYE SAID. "THE APPROACH SHOULD BE RESPECTFUL AND NOT MILITANT. THE WHOLE ISSUE NEEDS CAREFUL TALKING AND PATIENCE WHERE THE COMMUNITIES CONCERNED ARE SLOWLY BUT READILY EDUCATED."

BUT PATIENCE AND SLOW ACTION IS NOT THE SCANDINAVIAN APPROACH. FOURTEEN REPORTS ON FEMALE CIRCUMCISION ARE UNDER INVESTIGATION AT THE OSLO POLICE DEPARTMENT AND IN JUNE, NORWAY’S PARLIAMENT MADE A MOVE THAT IS LIKELY TO INCREASE THAT NUMBER EVEN MORE. THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS WAS CHANGED FROM 10 YEARS AFTER THE OFFENSE OCCURRED TO 10 YEARS AFTER THE VICTIM TURNS 18.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

FAMOUS QUOTES

DR. LAURENCE JOHNSTON PETER (1919 - 1990) 70 YEARS.

HE WAS AN EDUCATOR BEST KNOWN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC FOR THE FORMULATION OF THE PETER PRINCIPLE.

HE BEGAN HIS CAREER AS A TEACHER IN 1941. HE RECEIVED THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION FROM WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY IN 1963. IN 1964, PETER MOVED TO CALIFORNIA, WHERE HE BECAME AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION, AND DIRECTOR OF THE EVELYN FRIEDEN CENTRE FOR PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING, AND COORDINATOR OF PROGRAMS FOR EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

HE BECAME WIDELY FAMOUS IN 1968, ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE THE PETER PRINCIPLE:

"IN A HIERARCHY EVERY EMPLOYEE TENDS TO RISE TO HIS LEVEL OF INCOMPETENCE ... IN TIME EVERY POST TENDS TO BE OCCUPIED BY AN EMPLOYEE WHO IS INCOMPETENT TO CARRY OUT ITS DUTIES ... WORK IS ACCOMPLISHED BY THOSE EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE NOT YET REACHED THEIR LEVEL OF INCOMPETENCE."

"THE NOBLEST OF ALL DOGS IS THE HOT-DOG;

IT FEEDS THE HAND THAT BITES IT."

"THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF FAILURES:

THOSE WHO THOUGHT AND NEVER DID,

AND THOSE WHO DID AND NEVER THOUGHT."

"GREAT MINDS DISCUSS IDEAS, AVERAGE MINDS DISCUSS EVENTS,

SMALL MINDS DISCUSS PEOPLE."