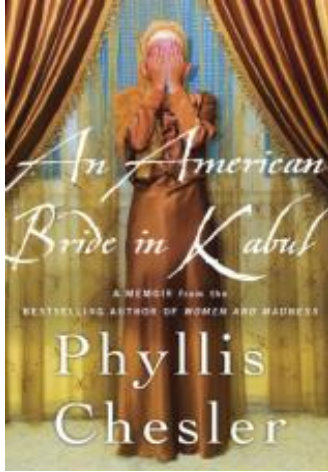


An American Bride in Kabul

by Phyllis Chesler



About the Book

Few westerners will ever be able to understand Muslim or Afghan society unless they are part of a Muslim family. Twenty years old and in love, Phyllis Chesler, a Jewish-American girl from Brooklyn, embarked on an adventure that has lasted for more than a half-century. In 1961, when she arrived in Kabul with her Afghan bridegroom, authorities took away her American passport. Chesler was now the property of her husband's family and had no rights of citizenship.

Back in Afghanistan, her husband, a wealthy, westernized foreign college student with dreams of reforming his country, reverted to traditional and tribal customs. Chesler found herself unexpectedly trapped in a posh polygamous family, with no chance of escape. She fought against her seclusion and lack of freedom, her Afghan family's attempts to convert her from Judaism to Islam, and her husband's wish to permanently tie her to the country through childbirth.

Drawing upon her personal diaries, Chesler recounts her ordeal, the nature of gender apartheid --- and her longing to explore this beautiful, ancient, and exotic country and culture. Chesler nearly died there but she managed to get out, returned to her studies in America, and became an author and an ardent activist for women's rights throughout the world. AN AMERICAN BRIDGE IN KABUL is the story of how a naïve American girl learned to see the world through eastern as well as western eyes and came to appreciate Enlightenment values. This dramatic tale re-creates a time gone by, a place that is no more, and shares the way in which Chesler turned adversity into a passion for world-wide social, educational, and political reform.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the author waited 50 years to tell this story?

2. What do you think drew her to the East?
3. Could you have traveled to harems in the 19th century or climbed mountains in dangerous countries as a woman alone--as so many Western women travelers have done? Chesler recounts some of their travels. Who did you like the most?
4. Phyllis had no clue that Abdul Kareem would change when he returned to Afghanistan. Why do you think he changed so abruptly and so radically?
5. Can you imagine what relationships might like between wives and children in a polygamous household?
6. What would it be like to live with your mother-in-law and to have to obey her?
7. Female modesty is a tenet of a number of religions. Do you think women who follow those religions welcome these requirements or see them as burdensome restrictions?
8. Why do you think female modesty is an issue in religions? Can you think of religions that also stress modesty in dress for males?
9. In Islam, there are various degrees of clothing used in the pursuit of female modesty, the most extreme being the burqa. Chesler likens this to a sensory deprivation isolation chamber. How would your daily life change if you wore a burqa?
10. Abdul Kareem wrote to Phyllis after she returned to the United States, pleading with her to return. Why would someone want to be married to a person so clearly unhappy in the relationship?
11. Chesler feels that the events of 9/11 set her life on a new path. How would your life be different if those events had never happened? Recall that 9/11 was plotted in Afghanistan.
12. Today, Chesler works with Muslim dissidents and feminists and believes that our governments should do likewise. Why do so many governments consult with the most fundamentalist of Muslims in the West as opposed to those in favor of human rights and women's rights?

Author Bio

Phyllis Chesler is an Emerita Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at City University of New York. She is a best-selling author, a legendary feminist leader, a psychotherapist and an expert courtroom witness. Dr. Chesler has published thousands of articles and, most recently, studies, about honor-related violence including honor killings. She has published many classic works such as **Women and Madness**, **Mothers on Trial**, **The Battle for Children and Custody**, and **Woman's Inhumanity to Woman**. She is about to publish her fifteenth book in October, 2013, titled **An American Bride in Kabul**.

Dr. Chesler has lived in Kabul and Jerusalem and now lives in New York City. She has led campaigns and lectured in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

Dr. Chesler is co-founder of the Association for Women in Psychology (1969), the National Women's Health Network (1974), and the International Committee for the Jerusalem based Women of the Wall (1989).

A revised and updated edition of **Women and Madness** was published in 2005; a new edition of **Woman's Inhumanity to Woman** with a new Introduction was published in 2009; and a Twenty Fifth anniversary edition of **Mothers on Trial** with eight new chapters was published in 2011. In 2009, 2010, and 2012, Dr. Chesler published three pioneering academic studies on honor killings and an academic article about the Burqa. All four studies appeared in *Middle East Quarterly*. Her work has been translated into many European languages and into Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Hebrew.

Since 9/11, Dr. Chesler has focused on the rights of women, dissidents, and gays in the Islamic world; on anti-Semitism and the demonization of Israel; the psychology of terrorism; the nature of propaganda; and honor-related violence. She has testified for Muslim and ex-Muslim women who are seeking asylum or citizenship based on their credible belief that their families will honor kill them.

Over the years, Dr. Chesler has appeared in the mainstream, leftwing, and rightwing media. She has been on "The Today Show" and "The O'Reilly Factor"; on "Donahue", "Geraldo", and "Oprah" and on the "700 Club"; Israel National radio, and Al-Hurrah. Dr. Chesler has been on "Nightline", Court TV, the History Channel, MSNBC, NPR, the "MacNeil-Lehrer Report" and CNN and on FOX News.

Dr. Chesler has been published, interviewed, and reviewed in *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Times of London*, *The New York Times*, *The Weekly Standard*, *National Review*, *Il Foglio*, *Ha'aretz*, *Frontpage.com*, *Salon*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The London Guardian*, *Israel National News*, *The Jewish Week*, *The Jewish Press*, *Psychology Today*, *Science Magazine*, etc.

There are over 4 million references to Dr. Chesler's work online. She has been profiled in many encyclopedias, including **Feminists Who Have Changed America**, **Jewish Women in America**, and in the latest **Encyclopedia Judaica**. Approximately 100,000+ people visit her website each year and from more than 180 countries. Her articles are archived at her website www.phyllis-chesler.com where she may also be contacted.

Critical Praise

"[E]ngrossing memoir ? Chesler adroitly blends her personal narrative with a riveting account of Afghanistan's troubled history, the ongoing Islamic/Islamist terrorism against Muslim civilians and the West, and the continuing struggle and courage of Afghan feminists."

? *Publishers Weekly*

"A renowned psychotherapist's richly compelling memoir about how her experiences as an Afghan man's wife shaped her as both a feminist and human rights activist? Intelligent, powerful and timely."

? *Kirkus Reviews*

"[F]ascinating and her insights on women's lives in Afghanistan [are] certainly worth reading."

? Booklist

"No human culture compromises the rights of women more than Islam. Today over 700 million women are directly or indirectly affected by the Koran and the teachings of Mohammed. Phyllis Chesler is by far the bravest and most outspoken American feminist to address the plight of Muslim women. In this book she shares with the reader her first encounter with Islam in Afghanistan. It is a moving account of the harrowing experience of one woman who almost meets her death in a culture that could not be more alien to her American upbringing. Yet every page is laden with compassion and love for the ex-husband and his family she unwittingly joined. I recommend this book be put on the reading list of every American school."

? Ayaan Hirsi Ali, author of **Infidel** and **Nomad**

"This is a bold book; intimate and rich in detail; as revealing a story about class, gender and religious differences as one will find. Chesler is a voice crying out for women. She had the right training. She will never stop."

? Kate Millett, author of **Sexual Politics** and **Going to Iran**

"This is a wondrous, invaluable memoir and meditation on women, culture, history, and the meaning of freedom. Phyllis Chesler tells a moving story in a direct, unaffected style and is able to draw conclusions of a wider import: reflections on the complex interplay of culture, more complex than the cliché of 'a clash of cultures.' After fifty years of reflection, Chesler is able to distil mature and wise judgments from her dramatic experience, on the persecution and suffering of Muslim women. Chesler's own feminism really began with these experiences in Afghanistan."

? Ibn Warraq, author of **Why I am Not Muslim** and **Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism**

"With a deft pen and a half-century of experience, Chesler revisits her brief, unpleasant, but life-changing and ultimately precious time in an Afghan harem. Although hardly the only feisty Western woman to despair at finding, on their visiting his home country, her debonair Muslim husband turned into an unrecognizably primitive tyrant, she drew unique benefits from the experience. These included finding her career focus (feminism), her field of study (psychology), her world outlook (principled liberalism) ?and this marvelous book."

? Daniel Pipes, Director of the Middle East Forum, author of **In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power**

"In her fascinating new memoir, Phyllis Chesler offers a vivid account of landing in Afghanistan in 1961 as a young bride ? and finding herself a victim and virtual prisoner of that country's cruel anti-women customs and habits. Many of the book's insights about 1961 Kabul seem oddly relevant to Kabul in 2013 ? a culture that, if possible, has become even more heinous to women with the advent of the Taliban. This is an eye-opening work."

? Lucette Lagnado, author of **The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit** and **The Arrogant Years**

"With **An American Bride in Kabul**, Phyllis Chesler brilliantly brings to life the plight of so many Muslim women helplessly trapped in the prison which is Islamist misogyny. Through the eyes of her innocent and insightful Brooklyn girl, Chesler provides humanity a service?a window into the internal workings of the male-dominated Islamist familial conspiracy against women. Her story is believable because it is sadly repeated millions of times around the globe."

? M. Zuhi Jasser, MD, President, American Islamic Forum for Democracy, author of **The Battle for the Soul of Islam: An American Muslim Patriot's Fight to Save His Faith**

"I love this book and could not put it down. It is the romantic and riveting story of a young woman from the orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park, who rebelled against a sheltered life in which women were religiously dominated by men and who then traveled to Afghanistan where she saw women who were far more oppressed and who lived under conditions of polygamy, purdah, poverty, and the burqa. This book has the power to inspire a new kind of interfaith dialogue."

? Rivka Haut, Author and Orthodox agunah activist, Co-Editor of **Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue**, Co-Editor of **Women of the Wall**, and Co-Editor of **Shaarei Simcha Gates of Joy**

"I loved every second of reading Chesler's amazing book. Kudos to her for standing in her truth. An American Bride in Kabul is a very courageous piece of work and I am in awe of Phyllis Chesler's determination to tell the truth of her experience, a truth which confirms the stories of so many Muslim women. I couldn't stop reading this book and felt Phyllis's powerful words grabbing my heart and opening up the deep emotions. A must read!"

? Soraya Miré, Author of **The Girl With Three Legs**

"Phyllis Chesler's **An American Bride in Kabul** is the most compelling autobiography I have read in a long time. It not only vividly tells us about women's lives in Afghanistan from the perspective of an American woman, but more importantly how and why American women fall into the trap of an Islamic marriage."

? Nonie Darwish, Author of **The Devil We Don't Know: The Dark Side of Revolutions in the Middle East**

"Phyllis Chesler's brilliant and courageous memoir will resound in your heart and mind long after you turn the final page. Her decades of academic and professional work advocating for women who cannot cry out for themselves is a tremendous legacy: the seeds of this deep calling were sown in Afghanistan and are now recounted here in this moving and marvelous book."

? Sara Aharon, author of **From Kabul to Queens: The Jews of Afghanistan and Their Move to the United States**

"Phyllis Chesler's newest book is rich and operatic, taking us into a world few of us have known about, telling us in descriptive, historical, political, religious, and deeply personal detail things that can transform our ways of thinking and feeling about everything from interpersonal dynamics to global politics. And this book illuminates one major reason she has for decades been the insightful, ardent, tireless feminist educator and activist she became."

? Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D., Harvard University psychologist and author of, among others, **The Myth of Women's Masochism** and **Don't Blame Mother**

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