Heart’s Desire. A Woman’s Longing for a Child


This little book is a poignant, intense and unflinchingly frank autobiography of an adventurous, fun-loving woman who, in the prime of her life, wants ‘everything — passionate love, close friendships, exciting work, exotic trips, and a child’. The book is about the author’s desperate but seemingly fruitless quest for motherhood. After four years of unsuccessfully trying to conceive naturally, she turns to the medical profession for help. The problem is diagnosed as stemming from tubal occlusion, and in this book she recounts her roller-coaster experience she describes in detail and with a mixture of passion and black humour. She is deflated by her doctor’s dispassionate reference to her aborted ‘babies’ as ‘foetal matter’ and ‘dead material’.

The book is also about life, love and fate for a Dutch woman in her thirties, and reads like a novel. Judith is a liberated woman, a free spirit with a freewheeling lifestyle. She lives, loves, hates, envies, and pursues her ambitions with absolute passion. She confesses to having ‘had a number of boyfriends, and at that time I was never monogamous’. On one occasion, she ‘went on a world trip and had one amorous adventure after another’. Her infertility stems from tubal occlusion and, although the notion is never broached in the book, one is left wondering whether the lifestyle she describes might have been considered as a possible aetiological reason for her problem.

All in all, this book – which has enjoyed wide circulation in a variety of languages – will make for thought-provoking (as well as entertaining) bedside reading for doctors and other health care providers, particularly for those whose vocation brings them in contact with patients seeking help for childlessness.

Daniel J Ncayiyana

Traditional Male Circumcision and Initiation into Manhood. Legal, health and environmental perspectives


Horrendous reports of genital mutilation, sepsis and death among youths undergoing traditional circumcision in the Eastern Cape have become an annually recurring nightmare. These deaths and injuries are a result of a combination of factors, among them the ignorance and incompetence of those performing the ritual using medieval techniques and equipment, and the physical abuse and deprivation meted out to these youngsters to ‘harden them up for manhood’. The SAMJ has been among the voices that have called for urgent intervention in this tragedy.

Dr Xola Kanta, the author of this manual-cum-encyclopaedia on ritual circumcision in the Eastern Cape, is founder of the community outreach organisation known as Impilo ya Bantu (health of the people) Health and Development Projects and, in this context, has been an ardent campaigner for measures to improve the safety of ritual circumcision in the Eastern Cape. Dr Xola holds impressive credentials: medical doctor with diplomas in forensic medicine and in medicine and the law, and a Master’s degree in clinical pharmacology. By way of intervention, Dr Kanta has trained more than 300 traditional operators and traditional nurses, is involved in public health education and awareness, performs pre-circumcision health assessment on intending candidates, treats circumcision complications, and performs postmortems on victims of ritual circumcision.

Dr Kanta has written this training manual, which is a comprehensive source of information for those intending to be involved in ritual circumcision, or have an interest in the context of the ritual. It consists of 8 sections and 22 chapters on topics ranging from historical and cultural perspectives to the health and medical aspects of traditional circumcision. It contains chapters on male genital anatomy and physiology, relevant microbiology (including HIV), and the current legal framework for traditional circumcision in the Eastern Cape. The book is printed in comfortable font, and contains graphs, maps and illustrative line drawings.

The book may be obtained by contacting Impilo ya Bantu, fax (086) 672-6727 or kantax@iafrica.com.

Daniel J Ncayiyana

All books reviewed are obtainable from SAMA-HMPG Book Department. Tel: (021) 530-6527, fax: (021) 531-4126, e-mail: books@samedical.org. All orders for SAMA members are subject to a minimum of 5% discount.