

LIVING

So Where are the Knights in Shining Armour?

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

IT'S not just about forgetting to put down the toilet seat or to flush afterwards, though these seemingly small transgressions if repeated can evoke murderous instincts in the sufferer. What we object to is the fact that while we are forced to swallow eastern male chauvinism with a smile why must we also be deprived of male gallantry that our lucky grandma's enjoyed?

Take the simple courtesies our fore mothers took for granted: opening the door for a lady giving up one's chair for a lady, serving her first, not letting her pay at least once in the four times that you're gone out, refraining from swearing in front of her, asking her before lighting a cigarette and before offering the pack to all the males in the room, the list is endless.

Now take a look at the scenario with today's overage Eastern man. In the office, he will greet only his male colleagues (unless of course, he finds his female colleague attractive) pretending that his female colleague is a part of the wall hangings. He will then light cigarettes one after the other, sometimes blousing smoke right into her face and generally exude an air of disdain and a "oh you don't know anything besides clothes and make up", sniggering expression.

Then he has the added virtue of making personal



comments, especially negative ones that he expects will be taken with grace or rewarded by coquettish giggles and grateful smiles. In fact, a woman colleague's physical proportions are of great interest to her male co-workers: "Bhaloi to mutiecho, kee bap-par?" (You're fatter than a pig, what's up?). A junior will dare to say, "Apni kintu oshombhob mota hoe gechen" (you have become impossibly fat). Thanks a lot, don't you thank I already know that you are a nincompoop, she will think between gritted teeth and an embarrassed laugh. If she has just come back after a holiday her female colleagues will say, "Its so good to see you, we really missed you!" or "Did you

have a good time?" Her male co-workers will greet her with, "My God, you're become so fat and so dark!" And they say we're catty.

The restaurants scene is even more revealing of how far male insensitivity can go. If you are a female be sure that the line of waiters at the entrance will leer at you but give their obsequious salaams to your male companion. The menu will be given to him, who, if he belongs to the MCP category, will just order what he thinks is appropriate for you. He may condescend to ask you what soft drink you would like to have but that's about it. When the bill comes and you are the one who pays it including the fat tip, the waiter will

promptly say, "Thank you sir salaam sir," to your male friend and dismiss you with a hurt of a smile. The same solicitous behaviour will be accorded to your male companion, not you, on your way out of the restaurant from the counter person to the darwan who almost forcefully opens the car door in the hope of a tip.

At the super markets the shop keepers will make no effort to hide their lecherous grins as they say in a rather sarcastic tone "Ashen Apumani, ki lagbe?" ("come on sister, what do you need?")

If one is a female and unfortunately enough to be forced to use the bus for transport she will experience the worst case of male discourtesy. The

sweaty men who will look her up and down will not budge an inch for her to move towards the 'women's only' seats which are in any case occupied by men. Those obtuse creatures will not have the decency to get up from the seats that are meant exclusively for members of her sex. If she protests they will pretend to be deaf and look the other way. Some one from the gaping male audience will make a suggestive comment like, "why don't you sit on my lap" and the lady in question should feel lucky if she survives this trip without pairs of groping hands on her person or deliberate pushes from all directions.

Many of our insensitive counterparts will be outraged by such criticism and say that we should not complain of such things when we demand equal rights. But let us be clear on the issue. We are not asking to be included in Abahoni's football team. Nor are we demanding a life membership at Dhaka Club's bar. As far as our 'feminist' impulses prompt us, we just want our basic rights as human beings, to be recognized. With this the only 'luxury' we ask for is the privilege most males in this country take as given: to be treated with respect. After all, being courteous to a woman should not be too painful for the male ego to bear, now should it?

As the saying goes, a thing of beauty is a joy forever. People over centuries have loved flowers and embellished their environment with it.

I have lived in Japan over a span of five years, and noticed that Japanese wives buy flowers as part of their regular grocery shopping. They can arrange just two or three flowers in such an artistic way that one cannot go without admiration.

This flowery art has an elaborate and unique form. The oldest form developed from the custom of offering flowers to Buddha as early as the 7th century AD by Ono Imoko, Japanese ambassador to China, and in Japan founded the first

Ikebana

by Ruksana Hossain

oldest school of floral art, called *Ikenobu*. Over the years a few schools have grown such as *Sogetsu*, *Koryu*, *Ohana*, *Gorin*, *Chiko Omura* and *Kofu*. Of all Japan's traditional arts, Ikebana is the most famous and actively practised. It is no more used only for the deity but office windows, conference rooms, hotel lobbies and public places are also decorated nicely with flowers.

While I was in Malaysia, a small group of ladies, including me, approached the Japanese counsellor's wife to give us a few lessons in Ikebana. She very gladly gave us lessons on Sogetsu management, which was founded in 1926 and is now the biggest and most popular school in Japan.

We bought our own flowers, mostly orchids, which were abundant and cheap in those

days. A flat round vase and a pin holder called *kenzan* was also needed. The weekly classes started off very seriously and we learned to appreciate flowers more and more.

Usually the styles are basic horizontal or basic slanting, consisting of a triangle of three points, representing heaven, earth and man. Emphasis is placed on linear perfection, colour, harmony, space and form. That means emphasis is given only to three main branches whereas in western style all flowers are given equal importance.

Iris, camellias, orchids, anthers, chrysanthemums, the

stately pine leaves and fruits, cherry blossoms other spring blossoms, bamboo grass, weeds, coconut leaves, usually foliage and other flowers of the season at hand are used.

Among the numerous schools, each one follows a particular set of rules keeping the fundamentals of that out intact. Containers, such as both tall and shallow vases, basket, cut bamboo are used. If the three branches used, *shin* is the main branch, it must be the strongest and the longest, and it is placed at 15° angle in the pin holder. *Soe*, or the second main branch is 1/3 less than the size of the *shin* and placed at 45° angle on the *kanzan*. The third branch, the *hake*, is placed at 75° angle and it is 1/3 less than the size of *soe*. A few subordinate branches called *justi* are arranged carefully between the three main branches.

While stationed in Japan I had more opportunities to learn Ikebana. I came in contact with a *Sogetsu* school teacher who also got orders to arrange flowers for public places and department stores.

She was paid quite handsomely for her weekly arrangements so that she managed to make a living with that payment. A married woman of 50, she enjoys a good life.

Before leaving Japan I took a few more lessons or another style called *Koxya*. The teacher was an old widow in her late sixties. She gave lessons almost every day perhaps to keep herself socially busy and earn a little bit at the same time. We paid Yen 2000 for each lesson which included the cost of the flowers which she herself bought for us. Tea and Japanese sweets were served each time. Japan is definitely a good place for learning various forms of art. Municipality offices in different districts offer cheap lessons in Ikebana. One can always get privately arranged lessons in jewellery art, ceramics, silk print, flower and bonsai or dwarf plant making.

Have a Care for Your Heart

by Fayza Haq

WHY is it that some people are more likely to have arterial diseases than others is not fully comprehended despite tremendous amount of medical research. In some parts of the world — Japan and China for example — coronary disease is less prevalent than in others including Western Europe and USA.

Family Pattern

There is no doubt that coronary disease runs in certain families and that if your parents, aunts and uncles have trouble of this sort you stand a greater risk than if all your near relatives are unaffected. It by no means follows that you will develop coronary disease and likewise there is no guarantee that someone without a family history will be immune. Hereditary tendencies cannot be changed but there are other risk factors over which we do have some control and which we may be able to influence to our advantage.

The part played by diet

This is a very complicated story with many conflicting views. It is closely related to the difficult and technical topic of fatty components in the blood, of which cholesterol is the best known and most discussed, we can make up our minds what we eat and how much we eat, and can vary our diets at will, what cannot be controlled is the way our bodies tackle the food once it is in our stomachs. As food passes through the alimentary canal various digestive juices containing enzymes break down the fat, protein, and carbohydrate which can then be absorbed into the blood stream through the wall of the small bowel. From there it is carried to the liver where further processing takes place. It then returns to the main blood stream and circulates to all organs in the body. It is thus not simply what we eat, but how our food is handled by the body chemistry.

Abnormally high levels of fat

In some people the level of some of the fatty compounds in the blood is much higher than the average for the population. Some people may suffer early in life (in their 20's and 30's) from coronary artery disease. In these people all doctors would agree that modification of the diet must be con-

sidered to try and arrest the progress of the arterial changes.

What about most of us?

Those patients with very abnormal fats, however, represent only a tiny fraction of the population and of the known sufferers from coronary disease. What should the rest of us do about our diet as insurance against future trouble. The most sensible advice for the general population and specially for those with a family history of coronary disease is to adopt what has been termed as a "prudent diet": eat fish and chicken; plenty of fresh fruit and fresh vegetables, grain and cereals; eat wholemeal or brown bread and use margarine. Allow yourself three eggs a week; drink milk but do not indulge in excessive dairy products. Aim at a modest reduction in total fat intake — and use corn or sunflower or soya bean oil for cooking.

Watch your weight

Find your "ideal weight" for your sex, age and height. If you are a stone over the mark, you certainly have cause for reflection.

Smoking is a real risk

The risk of dying from coronary artery disease appears to be at least twice as great in smokers as in non-smokers. In a study of British doctors it was found that in those who smoked, the frequency of death from coronary disease was four to five times greater than in non-smokers between the ages of 35 and 54. Nicotine affects the function of heart and arteries and that

carbon monoxide replaces oxygen in the blood stream.

Take some exercise

No amount of physical activity harms a healthy person; the human body is adapted to countless forms of exertion and demands exercise. So find time, specially if you have a sedentary occupation, for whatever exercise you prefer: gardening, walking, jogging, swimming etc.

High blood pressure

Control of the blood pressure by weight reduction or by drugs have been proved to reduce the likelihood of strokes and heart failure but unfortunately there is as yet no convincing evidence that reducing pressure prevents heart attacks in those who already have symptoms of coronary disease.

Stress and anxiety

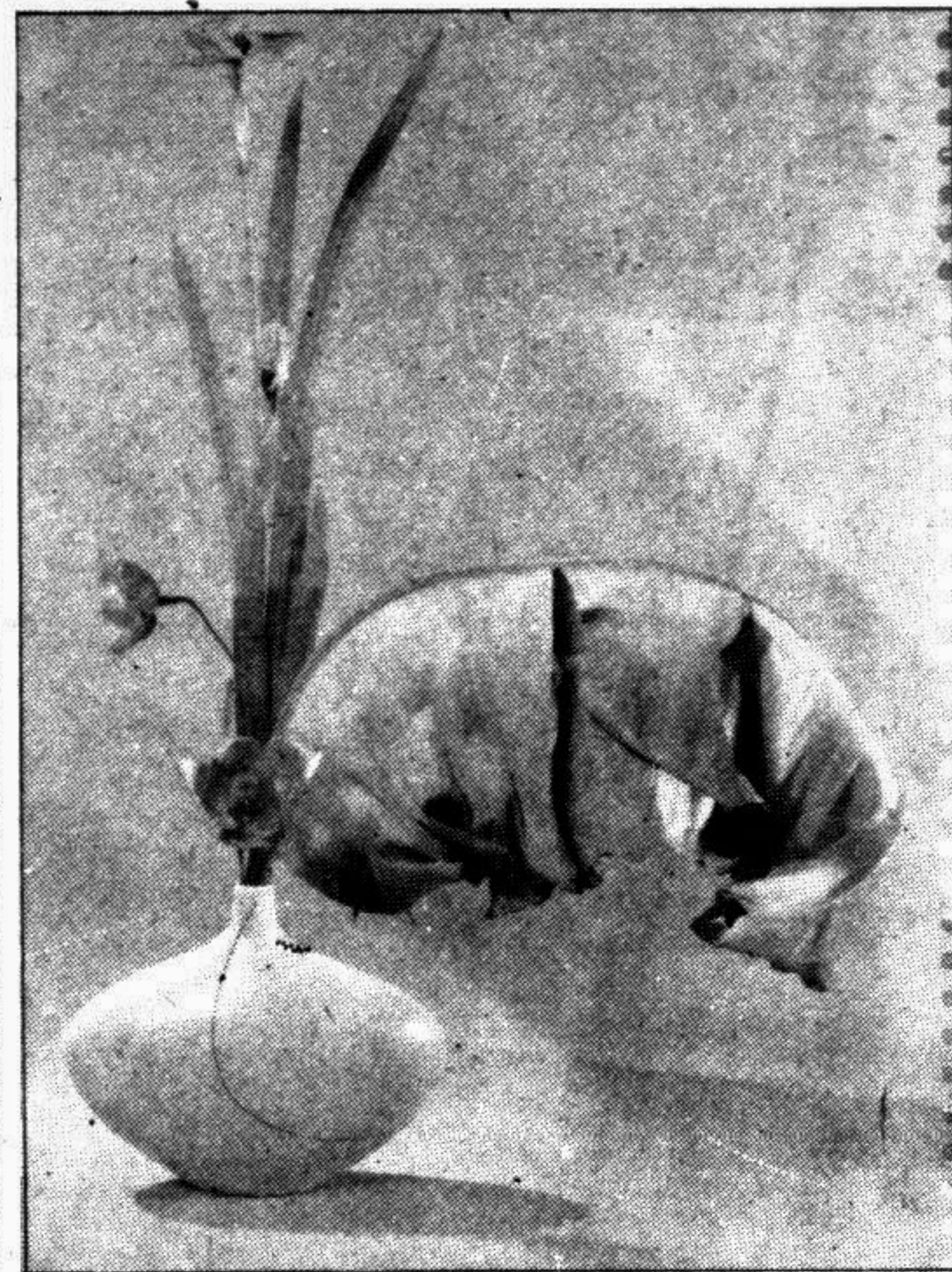
The mental states of anxiety, fear, irritation, and frustration are unpleasant and it is sensible to avoid them.

Diabetes

Although the frequency of coronary disease is greater in diabetics than in non-diabetics it is not possible to state that diabetes is itself a potent cause of coronary disease.

What about the pill?

Figures show that women aged over 40 taking the contraceptive pill have an increased risk of heart attack compared to those who do not. In some women the pill is associated with high blood pressure, and in others (rarely) with strokes. (This article is based on a paper by RW Postal)



Samples of Ikebana

Marriages Then and Now

by Sayeda Choudhury

IT was the month of September and an unusual day. Sitting in my veranda I was enjoying my garden with its fruit-laden trees. The day began with bright sunshine, but suddenly it turned black and the next moment torrential rain began pouring. With the rhythm of rain, I got lost in my childhood memories. I recalled the wedding of my eldest sister, which took place in our village home, at Bhadeshwar (Sylhet) in 1944. It was a simple occasion, but still stands out in my mind. We were very enthusiastic about this wedding because it was the first of such an occasion in our family. Our father had decided that it must take place in our village home.

Our village home was fifteen miles from the town. To avoid the hazardous *kuchcha* road we went by boat and it took us all night. The river was quiet and we had our dinner on the

boat. The next morning we were received at the river ghat by our uncle. At the village there was no electricity or running water, but life was enjoyable despite being without these modern facilities.

Arrangements were begun for the wedding. My father had invited all the relatives, specially those who were not well off and they arrived a week ahead. To accommodate them a few tents had been set up. I remember my mother and aunts were busy in the kitchen preparing food for the people. It was their great pride to entertain the guests by their own effort. It was a major task for my father to look after the guests, yet he was happy being with the people he cared for. How long the rain continued I did not know, as I was deeply absorbed in my thoughts. A telephone rang and brought me back to reality.

Those days of the past are gone. The simplicity of life

does not inspire us any more. We are too occupied with ourselves and have no time to think about others. Occasions like weddings have become the source of amusements where we show ourselves off. These functions are exclusively for the rich people. We have cultivated a culture which is neither western nor traditionally eastern. We are alien to ourselves. We are chasing a goal that only caters to the rich.

One day I found myself preparing for an important wedding. I brought out a beautiful *sari* of the latest design, and wore some brilliant jewellery to match with it. At six o'clock my husband and I reached our destination. They house was noticeable from a distance, with its eye-catching lights. About a thousand people had been invited. I was proud to participate in such an occasion. Many of my friends were present and as usual the main

subject of conversation was clothes and jewellery. Soon I found myself feeling quite insignificant, as others were wearing more expensive items than I was. Suddenly something unexpected happened. We heard a hue and cry and people began running in all directions. No one knew what was happening at first. When I myself went to investigate, I froze with terror.

The wedding place was being attacked by bandits who were snatching jewellery from the guest. Every body, at first, was perplexed and did not know what to do. Next two of the bold invitees grabbed some of the dacoits, putting their own life in jeopardy. It was a great shock to the guests and many of them even left without dinner. A place which was so colourful and cheerful a moment ago turned into a disaster. By the time we reached home it was almost midnight. Was I grateful that my own precious jewels were not taken by bandits? Instantly my memory went back to that simple wedding in my childhood which had given me so much of delight.



A cool ensemble to face the humidity. Courtesy: Libas International

Natural Bath Preparations

HERBAL baths are a refreshing alternative and are useful for sufferers from cystitis, who should avoid perfumed bubble baths and oils. Tie a handful of fresh herbs in a piece of muslin and fasten it under the bath taps. Run the hot water first to release the scent from the herbs and then top up with cold water. If fresh herbs are not available, you can use dried herbs instead. A drop of baby or almond oil in the water will stop your skin from drying out.

Sink into a warm bath scented with essential oils — rose or camomile (to relax and soothe), for example. Make sure the water is not too hot, because this will overstimulate the nervous system and inhibit the therapeutic powers of the oils. To make this indulgent soak extra special, put on some soft, soothing music, dim the lights in the bathroom and relax.

Meditate, in a warm, relaxing bath by closing your eyes, breathing in deeply and

thinking beautiful thoughts — for example, you might like to imagine that you are relaxing on a favourite beach, listening to the sound of waves gently lapping on the shore and the breeze whispering in the palm trees overhead. Add a few drops of essential oil to increase the skin-soothing properties of your bath.

The scent of orange is considered a pick-me-up and an antidepressant, so it is an ideal perfume to add to the bath at the end of a long, hard day. Add a drop of essential oil of orange or squeeze a seedless orange into the bathwater to refresh yourself and to aid relaxation.

Body or baby oil can also be used as a bath oil. Maximize the moisturizing potential of the oil by soaking in the bath first before adding a few drops of your chosen oil to the water. This will ensure that the oil veils your skin and seals in some of the water absorbed in the soak.

Cleopatra is said to have bathed in ass's milk to enhance her beauty. Instead of ass's milk, try adding 1/4 pint (150ml) of ordinary milk to the running water, or try 2 tablespoons (40ml) of dried milk for the same effect. For extra indulgence and to give the bath a tropical feel, add a few drops of coconut essence.

Looking After Your Legs

If you want to have silky smooth legs, exfoliate using a vegetable-based soap on a damp loofah or body brush, sweeping it up over wet skin in massaging movements. This will get rid of dead skin cells and loosen sebum blockages in pores. Legs have comparatively few sebaceous glands and are, therefore, prone to dryness. After a bath, slick on plenty of moisturizer, using upward massage movements. The steam from the bath will help to lock in moisture.

If you suffer from exceptionally flaky winter legs try this pack while you are in the bath. Mash a banana and 1 tablespoon (10ml) of thick cream and smooth it on to your skin. Leave for 10 min-

utes, then rinse off to reveal beautifully smooth legs.

Swollen ankles will be soothed by a solution of 2 tablespoons (40ml) of Epsom salts in 1 3/4 pints (1 litre) of lukewarm water. Bathe your feet and ankles for 10 minutes, then immerse them in cold water to reduce the swelling. Pat dry and massage gently until the aching stops.

Scalp Massage

To release tension in your head, try scalp massage while you are in the bath. Start at the front of your head and press your finger tips firmly against your scalp. Gently move the scalp back and forth five times. Repeat, moving your fingers until you have covered your whole head.

Body Scrubs

For an inexpensive body scrub that will effectively smooth away roughness and soften your skin, try sea salt. First, apply a little vegetable oil, such as almond or olive oil, to dampen your skin. Then give yourself a good rub with handfuls of sea salt, concentrating on any dry patches, such as your knees or elbows. Rinse off with a forceful shower of warm water followed by a cold shower to complete the toning treatment.

Face packs need not be used only on your face. Try them on other areas of your body such as your shoulders to unclog pores and slough off dead skin.

Clean greasy patches on shoulders and back with a soap-filled backbrush or loofah. If your back is badly blemished, use a deep-cleansing pack made from some fuller's earth mixed with a little water and lemon juice. Leave to dry and rinse off thoroughly with lukewarm water.

Facial scrubs and sponges to exfoliate the face can also be used on neglected areas such as rough knees and elbows. Massage thoroughly, then rinse. Apply a moisturizer or some handcream. (Handcream can be more economical than body lotion and just as effective.)