



Love & Sex In Muslim Societies

Addressing the Taboos

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INTRODUCTION

“Love” is that word, which makes the eyes of youths glow upon hearing it, especially when they are in love. That word represents the strongest emotion one can experience.

Of course, the word “love” is not restricted to one meaning because there are many kinds of love. There is love for parents, partners, children, country, friends and love for God. However, here we are discussing one kind of love, which is the attraction between a young man and a young woman; we are talking about youth love.

Youth love is a sensitive issue for most Muslim families. Many parents will not feel comfortable talking with their sons or daughters about love in general or about the person they feel attracted to.



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On the other hand, those sons and daughters rarely speak with their parents about their feelings in order to avoid any clash or because they are sure their feelings and thoughts will never be understood.

This makes the first part of our ebook.

The second part revolves around an even more sensitive word, which is “Sex”. Sex is part of nature, it is allowed by Allah and it is a beautiful thing to do when it is made with love, respect, responsibility and most importantly, when it is done within the halal frame that abides by religious rules.

However, in many Muslim homes this word is considered a taboo. Some Muslims even misunderstand religion to the extent that they prohibit things that Allah has made halal for us and they overdo it!

In this ebook, Onislam’s Family & Society provides you with many interesting articles that tackle the sensitive issues of love and sex in Muslim societies in addition to some questions -related to love



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and sex- that we received through our Counseling service and were answered by our professional counselors.

We hope our ebook will be of a great benefit to our readers.

Family & Society Team





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CHAPTER ONE LOVE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES





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‘MUSLIMS DON’T FALL IN LOVE BEFORE MARRIAGE’

Part 1: Understanding Young Love

By Umm Zakiyyah*

“Muslims don’t fall in love before marriage,” the woman said proudly. “That’s something only non-Muslims do.”

When I first heard this statement, I was confused. But maybe I





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was misunderstanding what the woman meant. Perhaps the woman was just saying that Muslims don't have sex before marriage (or at least that they're not supposed to).

Muslims don't live together and "play house" before deciding whether or not to take the "big step" and get married. Perhaps in the mind of this woman, and that of Muslims who shared her sentiment, this was "falling in love" and thus something Muslims simply did not do.

♥ "I love a boy. Can you help me?"

I had just finished teaching a class at a Muslim weekend school when I was approached by a girl who appeared to be about thirteen years old. "Can I talk to you?" she said to me. "I need some advice."

"Sure," I told her, "no problem."

"At school, there's a boy I love," she said, "and I don't know what to do about it." She glanced sideways to make sure none of her peers or elders could hear her talking to me. "Can you help me?"



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“How did you meet him?” I asked.

“He goes to my school.”

“But how did you meet?”

“He just goes to my school,” she said again, slight confusion on her face.

“Yes, I know,” I said. “But how do you know him? Do you talk on the phone? Do you meet up at school?”

“No,” she said. “I barely know him.”

Now it was my turn to be confused. “Are you trying to get to know him?”

“No.” She appeared taken aback by the question. “I’m Muslim.”

“Then what’s the problem?” I said.



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“I love him, and I know it’s wrong,” she said. “I tried to stop it, but I can’t.” She looked desperate as she looked at me. “What should I do?”

“Listen,” I told her. “It’s not a sin to be attracted to boys.”

♥ What Love Means

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines love as “a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person.” It also defines love as “attraction that includes sexual desire” and “the strong affection felt by people who have a romantic relationship.”

Based on the definition of love, loving a person or “falling in love” can include an intimate relationship (and thus can involve sin if the man and woman are not married), but love itself is not contingent upon any conscious actions on a person’s part. In fact, love can be confined to a person’s heart without the other person ever knowing anything about it.

Therefore, love outside the bounds of marriage is not necessarily sinful, and it’s certainly not sinful to “fall in love” before marriage.



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♥ So I'm Not in Sin?

After I told the girl that it isn't sinful to be attracted to boys, the girl's eyes widened. "It's not?"

"No," I said. "It's just the way Allah created us. We can't help it. Girls will be attracted to boys. Boys will be attracted to girls. And after lowering our gazes and staying away from what's wrong, there's nothing we can do about that."

"But I thought..."

"It's what you say or do about this feeling that can make it sinful," I said. "If you just have this feeling in your heart and you don't do anything about it, that's not wrong. But you can pray to Allah to make the feeling go away," I suggested, "especially if it's distracting you from other things."

She looked positively relieved. "Thanks," she said, smiling broadly as she walked away.



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♥ Puppy Love

When I was growing up in America, I'd often hear adults laugh whenever an adolescent or teenager was attracted to someone. Their tone was often playfully condescending when they waved their hands dismissively saying, "Oh, that's just puppy love. These kids have no idea what love means."

And perhaps the adults were right. Maybe "kids" really don't have a clue what love means. Maybe what these youth are feeling is just "puppy love," a strong feeling of attraction that would pass with time and about which they would laugh about later.

But even so, this doesn't invalidate the authenticity of the young person's feelings, which very well may fit into the definition of "love," even the love is short-lived and won't amount to much more than an overwhelming sense of desire for someone.

♥ When Young Love Is Real

Often when we think of real stories of young love, we turn to the pages of ancient history or folklore. In the famous



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Shakespearean drama Romeo and Juliet, the character Juliet is reportedly only thirteen years old while Romeo isn't too much older. However, in the Shakespearean era, the concept of young lovers was not limited to fiction or drama.

In earlier times, particularly in European (or “Western”) history, it was not uncommon for young men and women to fall in love and marry quite young. In fact, if a person was unmarried by the age of twenty, this was frowned upon and the person was feared to be “too old” for any hope for marriage. In Islamic history, the love of young Aishah toward Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is often cited.

However, it is not only in fictional tales and “days of old” that young love has proven real. In the modern world, there are many true stories of young love, and they continue to happen each day.



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♥ Famous Young Love

When I was in high school, one of my favorite songs was “Everybody Plays the Fool” by Aaron Neville, and I often think of this song when I think of young people falling in love.

This is not only because the song itself alludes to the foolishness young people often fall into in the name of love, but because the singer himself experienced young love. Aaron Neville met his beloved while they were both around fifteen or sixteen years old, and they got married when they were only eighteen; and they were married for almost fifty years when his wife died from cancer in 2007.

The famous singer Celine Dion also experienced young love. She met her future husband René Angélil when she was only twelve years old and he was thirty-eight; and they began a relationship when she was nineteen years old. And they are still married today.



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♥ Are You in Love?

This is a question that young people often ask themselves. Unfortunately, it's also a question they are often left alone to answer. Perhaps, what they're experiencing is just "puppy love" that amounts to a passing "crush," or maybe what they're experiencing is genuine young love the like of which fascinates us from fiction stories, ancient history, and modern day love stories.

But perhaps what they're experiencing is something in between, a feeling that will one day pass but consumes them so much today that it drives them to act on it in the most reckless ways, especially if they are unable or unwilling to marry the person they love.

Such is the affair of many youth today, Muslims among them.

And in this "Are You in Love?" series, we explore the wide range of issues that define "love" for many Muslim youth in today's world.



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WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR LOVE?

P2: Dangers of Youthful Attraction

By Umm Zakiyyah

♥ The Dilemma of a Muslim Girl

Had Inaya really spent the entire day at school without hijab?





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“You’ll need a visitor’s pass and a chaperone,” Raymond had said to Inaya as she waited in the school hallway for her parents to finish registering her as a student at the American high school.

At the time, Inaya was wearing hijab, and the black cloth was wrapped securely around her head, and she imagined that her abaya, the large black outer garment that she wore, looked like an oversized dress.

Inaya lifted her eyebrows. “A chaperone?”

He laughed lightly. “I know it sounds like a first date, but it’s our school policy for visitors.”

Inaya’s cheeks grew warm, and she averted her gaze. “I’m sorry... I didn’t know. I just...”

“Where are you from?”

“I’m sorry?” Inaya glanced up at the student ambassador, a confused expression on her face.



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Raymond smiled, and the long dimples in his cheeks made Inaya think of the singer Usher. “I’m not good at judging ethnicities,” he said.

“I’m American,” Inaya said. Did her Muslim clothes make her look foreign?

“Do you want to take a look around the school?” he asked.

Inaya grinned, surprised by how comfortable she felt in the male student’s presence. “I thought I needed a chaperone for that.”

A smile spread on his face. “I could be your chaperone.”

Inaya was silent as she rode in the back of the car after her parents finished the registration process. She sunk low into her seat until the car was far from the school. She couldn’t shake the feeling of shame right then. Her mother and stepfather looked like extremists.

She couldn’t imagine what Raymond thought of her stepfather’s obvious Arab appearance and large beard—and her mother’s all-black Saudi-style abaya and face veil. A wave of embarrassment



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passed through Inaya as she wondered what Raymond must think of her. *Ugh*. Why did he have to be standing in the hall when her parents walked out of the office?

♥ What Will She Sacrifice for Love?

Unfortunately, the internal struggle faced by the fictional character Inaya in the novel *Muslim Girl* is not uncommon for Muslim youth, especially for those who attend co-ed, predominately non-Muslim schools. Beyond the Islamophobic sociopolitical contexts in which many of these youth are forced to live, these Muslim youth face the same struggles of any hormonal teen. Girls are attracted to boys. Boys are attracted to girls. And this physical attraction does not discriminate based on one's ethnicity, color, or even religious affiliation.

Clearly, a natural physical attraction is brewing between Inaya and Raymond, a Muslim girl and a Christian boy. But for Inaya, her struggle goes beyond mere “butterflies” fluttering within. And it even goes beyond the natural insecurity that physical attraction ignites when someone is unsure if the attraction is



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mutual. Rather, Inaya's struggle strikes at the very core of her identity: her spirituality and "Muslim-ness."

Will the boy even find Inaya attractive as a Muslim girl in hijab? This is the question Inaya is essentially asking herself. Regardless of the answer to this question, Inaya is in a spiritual crisis. If Raymond does in fact find her attractive in hijab, she would be compromising her religious obligations if she responds to his advances. If he does not find her attractive in hijab, she would be compromising her religious obligations if she removes her Islamic garb.

Unfortunately for Inaya, she ultimately decides to remove her hijab to "fit in" and appear more "attractive."

♥ The Real Dilemma

For many Muslim youth who find themselves in predicaments like Inaya's, they ask themselves the same question that Inaya asked: Will the boy (or girl) like me as a Muslim? To the youth struggling with this situation, their dilemma appears to stem



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from the answer to this question. However, they do not realize that their real dilemma is the question itself.

Once a Muslim teen reaches the point that he or she is seriously asking himself or herself this question, spiritual crisis almost certainly awaits. This is because, for the Muslim, the real struggle lies in avoiding the question, not in answering it.

While it's natural to feel attracted to the opposite sex (regardless of a person's religious affiliation), Islam has placed definite limits on acting on this attraction; and marriage is the only permissible context for actively expressing this attraction, emotionally or intimately.

But in the case of a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, not even marriage itself solves their dilemma. This is because they are not ever permitted to be married to each other—unless the man accepts Islam.

Nevertheless, in social contexts like American public school, marriage is hardly on the mind of either the boy or girl feeling physical attraction. In fact, it is often part of the “excitement”



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that no serious commitment is attached to acting on this “innocent” affection, hence the infamous culture of “boyfriends” and “girlfriends.” In Western cultural contexts, the seemingly innocuous titles of boyfriend and girlfriend actually allude to a commitment to engage in zina (illicit sex) with a specific person on a regular basis.

♥ Oblivious Muslim Parents and Dangerous “Puppy Love”

As I discussed briefly in my post “Muslims Don’t Fall in Love Before Marriage,” adults often make light of youth’s feelings of attraction, hence the common term puppy love. Unfortunately, what is called “puppy love” is a lot more serious than the terminology suggests.

Therefore, making fun of the very real feelings of young adult children does nothing help these youth work through these feelings and understand what they’re feeling and why they’re feeling it.

For Muslim parents, the scenario is often much worse because many have not reached the point where they are able to even



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openly acknowledge their children's feelings of physical attraction, let alone make fun of these feelings.

Many Muslim parents are voluntarily oblivious to what their young adult children are going through, and these parents behave as if the mere discussion of physical attraction or sex is sinful, even in the context of marriage “one day.”

Naturally, this attitude makes the discussion of working through physical attraction toward the opposite sex in the context of school or other social environments unthinkable. Thus, what results are increased spiritual crisis amongst Muslim youth (as we see in the struggle of Inaya) and increased illicit relationships between not only Muslims and non-Muslims, but between Muslim boys and girls themselves.

Ironically, many of these sinful relationships could be avoided if these Muslim youth felt comfortable talking to their parents or other trusted adults about their feelings before the attraction reached the point of physical intimacy. I myself have witnessed the almost phenomenal effect of simply letting Muslim girls and boys know that what they're feeling is completely natural and



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that the feeling itself is neither sinful nor something to be ashamed of.

At times, the youth's ability to merely come to terms with the natural struggle of physical attraction, which in itself is not necessarily indicative of any "special connection" or fated partnership, resolves the dilemma before it even becomes a problem.

♥ It's Not Always That Easy

As an American Muslim girl who went to public school throughout my youth, I

myself often worked through the natural struggle of physical attraction to non-Muslim (and Muslim) classmates. Undoubtedly, after the mercy of Allah, my "saving grace" that protected me from falling into the sin of zina was my ability to be open with myself psychologically and spiritually about the completely natural feelings that I was experiencing, without feeling sinful or ashamed about what I was going through (an ability I am certainly indebted to my parents for).



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However, it's not always that easy. And this is where both Muslim parents (or trusted Muslim elders) and Muslim youth need to be very honest with themselves and each other when giving and seeking advice.

Every case of physical attraction is not merely “puppy love,” which youth can presumably mentally work through by merely accepting the natural feelings of physical attraction that they're experiencing. And while it is true that the intensity of physical attraction outside the context of marriage is often fueled by Shaytaan (the Devil), this knowledge alone does not necessarily solve the dilemma.

Moreover, even heeding the oft-repeated religious advice to “simply” pray and read Qur'an does not remove the problem altogether though prayer and recitation of the Qur'an are certainly helpful in weathering the storm of emotions and desires.

In the most serious cases of youthful attraction, intense physical attraction is coupled with deep affection that has penetrated the



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hearts of both the girl and the boy, thus culminating into what is for all intents and purposes “falling in love.”

When the mutual attraction reaches the level of what feels like genuine love, staying away from sin is not so easy, and the youth often find themselves seriously pondering the question, “What are you willing to sacrifice for love?”

Fortunately, for some Muslim youth, their answer is resoundingly, “Nothing, if it compromises my soul.” However, as we can see in the case of Inaya’s attraction to the student Raymond, in far too many cases, the concept of protecting one’s soul becomes blurred until some youth decide that it is some aspects of Islam itself that must be sacrificed in answering this question.

This is when we begin to see manifestations of the very real spiritual dangers of youthful attraction. Thus, this is also where parents and trusted adults need to put aside their misgivings about the topics of physical attraction and “young love” and become more vigilant, understanding, and available to youth who are genuinely trying to save their souls from sinful demise.



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WHEN LOVE AND WORSHIP COLLIDE

P3: 'He Distracts Her From Allah'

By Umm Zakiyyah

♥ From the Journal of
Renee

I returned from the
masjid to my
college dormitory room
late Saturday
night, shaken and
moved. I glanced at the





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clock. It was three minutes after ten. Where had the time gone? I slowly shut my eyes, hoping to digest everything better that way.

I let the events of the afternoon, evening, and night wash over me. I hoped to analyze my reason for unrest as I had earlier concerning my faith.

It was Yusuf's poem, I concluded, that affected me most. As I recalled his monologue, I felt a storm of emotions that I couldn't give name to. I could think only of the lyrics to a song I'd heard Courtney playing over and over when my parents weren't home.

I felt all flushed with fever, embarrassed by the crowd

I felt he found my letters, and read each one aloud

I prayed that he would finish, but he just kept right on

Strumming my pain with his fingers

Singing my life with his words



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Killing me softly with his song

Years later, I learned that these were the words to the song “Killing Me Softly” that I heard Lauryn Hill singing from my sister’s stereo, though I have no idea who wrote these words originally. But, at that moment, it didn’t matter. And I didn’t care.

All I knew was that these were the only words that could give name to the emotions I had felt as the young man I’d met at the “Ask About Islam” table stood on a portable stage in the basement of a local masjid. I couldn’t remember his name—they had said it when they introduced him.

Naturally, he had not been the only performer. But he was the only one I remembered so vividly.

Weeks later, when I attended another Muslim event with my friend Sumayyah, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Yusuf was one of the performers. When the time for his performance grew near, I was taken aback by how packed the seats became all of a sudden. I was impressed. Apparently, he was well known in



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the area. I was grateful to Sumayyah for reserving our seats early on.

I was speechless by the time Yusuf finally stepped onto the stage. I barely noticed the three men seated at the rear of the platform, the one in the middle holding a small drum. But after Yusuf reached the microphone, their voices resonated in a harmonizing tenor above the gentle beating on the drum, reminding me of native music from South Africa.

Yusuf wore a long white thobe that lifted and clung to him slightly with the wind, revealing his athletic form beneath the thin fabric.

I was offended that Sumayyah thought I wanted to marry him. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I only wanted to talk to him on the phone and get to know him better. But I couldn't escape the stinging pain I felt in my heart upon realizing I didn't even stand a chance at attracting his attentions.



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♥ The Reality of Submitting to Allah

The reality is that, as we strive to submit to Allah, there will always be other distractions, especially from the opposite sex, as we can see in the case of Renee in the excerpt from my novel *Realities of Submission*. Clearly, Renee's trips to the masjid and Muslim events become so meaningful to her largely because she has the opportunity to see Yusuf and enjoy his presence.

However, what is dangerous about Renee's fascination with Yusuf is that she does not necessarily want to marry him, and even the suggestion of marriage offends her. She openly admits that she only wishes to talk to him on the phone and "get to know him better."

Unfortunately, Renee's mindset reflects that of many Muslim youth in today's world. For too many of them, the masjid represents less a place to draw closer to Allah and more a place to draw closer to the young man or woman who has captured their affections.



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A scholar was once asked, “Why do we get so easily distracted by the life of this world when we know it is worth very little in comparison to the Hereafter?” The scholar responded, “Because the life of this world is in front of us.”

And Yusuf was in front of Renee, as the opposite sex is in front of Muslim youth.

It is easy to scoff at youth like Renee, who appear to be doing something sacrilegious when they go to the masjid or a Muslim event looking forward to seeing someone they are attracted to. Some Muslims might even proclaim that it is better for them to stay home than to come to places of Allah’s remembrance with impure intentions.

However, we should hesitate before passing judgment, lest we discourage Muslim youth from coming around Muslims at all. Excitement to see the opposite sex, especially in one’s teens when hormones are raging, is completely normal, and this excitement doesn’t “magically” disappear when we enter the house of Allah or attend an Islamic lecture. Our humanity follows



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us wherever we go, even in the privacy of our homes and even during overt acts of worship like prayer and supplication to Allah.

Staying away from places of worship and activities where one is likely to be reminded of Allah cannot possibly solve any problem, let alone a problem that is inherently spiritual. If anything, staying away from places of where Allah's name is mentioned will only worsen the problem. Thus, the only solution is for the young man or woman to continuously strive against impure intentions, especially when they enter the house of Allah.

We do not stand before Allah because we are already pure. We stand before Allah because we hope to be purified.

This is the lesson we need to teach Muslim youth who, like Renee, are struggling with natural raging hormones and attraction to the opposite sex. And this lesson is all the more important for the youth to inculcate into their practical lives .

♥ When Worship and Love Collide

One fact of life that both Muslim youth and adults need to understand is that our worship and human weakness will



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constantly collide and be at odds with each other during our time on earth. We cannot remove this reality from our lives any more than we can avoid ultimately standing in front of Allah on the Day of Judgment. This is all part of Allah's *qadr*, His divine decree for us.

Our job then, is to face these tests by turning to Allah and constantly striving against succumbing to our lower desires. However, when we do fall short and sin, it is crucial that we understand, in the depths of our hearts, that Allah is All-Forgiving and Most Merciful to those who continuously engage in *jihad al-nafs*, the internal battle of the self against the self.

Thus, when youth like Renee find that an attractive boy or girl distracts them from Allah, they should know that all hope is not lost, even if they at times give into human weakness. They should continue to come to the masjid. They should continue to come to Muslim events. And they should continue having hope in Allah's mercy and forgiveness.

Because, when love and worship collide, staying away from the masjid and other places of Allah's remembrance cannot protect



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us from facing ourselves, and more importantly, it cannot protect us from facing Allah.





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DEBUNKING MYTHS OF LOVE

**Discussing Love From An
Islamic Social Perspective**

By Raudah Mohd Yunus

Have you ever fallen in love with someone from the opposite gender? Did you feel free to let other people know about your feelings or did you suddenly have to struggle with keeping them a secret? How did your close family member(s) or friend(s) react when they came to know?



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Falling in love is not always a pleasant experience. Love, especially for the opposite gender is often deemed evil or dangerous by traditional social mores. Parents and elderly relatives cringe uncomfortably upon hearing the word. They try to dismiss it, or threaten their teens with severe punishment if they even think about it. As a result, society lives in perpetual denial and lives in the illusion that such ‘forbidden’ love does not exist and will never enter into the minds of their youths.

The fact that love is highly stigmatized makes it difficult or almost impossible for youngsters to admit having experienced it, let alone express their love. They constantly suppress it to avoid tension and being frowned upon by society.

Muslim society too is not spared from this phenomenon. The term “love” seems to have been interchanged with immorality, indecency, illicit sexual conducts and disgrace. Some people go to one extreme by harshly criticizing anyone who dares to openly bring up the issue and thus stereotype the young generation without first trying to understand their circumstances.



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♥ What is love?

Love per se is innocent. An ordinary dictionary defines it as ‘an intense feeling of deep affection/ warmth/ fondness/ sense of attachment’. By itself, love does not cause any harm; rather it is a positive attitude. The problem, however, starts when the meaning of love is distorted or contaminated by foreign elements. Ask an ordinary youth to define love and you may find their perception totally misguided.

Movies, songs and the media today have unfortunately hijacked the notion of love and cruelly deceived the young generation into believing that love is all about free intermingling between men and women, chemistry, adventures, romance, premarital sex, Valentine’s Day and other shallow occasions. This philosophy has become so deep-rooted that without all these, true and real love does not seem to be possible.

What society and youngsters are oblivious to is the difference between pure love and lust (desires). Hollywood movies and songs have somewhat successfully erased the demarcating line between the two and caused terrible confusion in today’s young



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generation. Youths today have been indoctrinated with the ‘love = lust’ equation. They no longer perceive lust as a temporary desire and love as a commitment; rather they see love as instant self-gratification with all the brief moments of excitement. Hence they ask: Without sexual titillation, how can love spark?

Islam purifies love by gently addressing the humans’ hearts. In Islam, love between humans is good, not evil. Love between a man and a woman is not summarily regarded as sinful and condemned. In fact, there are innumerable verses and hadiths saying that there must be love and compassion between Muslims, men or women. The nature of this love however, is more comprehensive and noble.

Love in Islam is based on faith alone and nothing else. Physical beauty, wealth, speech eloquence or intelligence does not play a role in dictating love. When the foundation is faith and love for God, that ‘intense feeling of deep affection’ becomes unique; one loves solely for the benefit of the beloved. He or she does not expect anything in return or wishes for any of their parochial interests. This is the ultimate feature of true love.



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Having understood the concept of love from the Islamic perspective, it can be safely said that any love that may exist between a man and a woman is not always forbidden. This kind of love may or may not lead to marriage. As love is a matter of heart and the heart is in Allah's hands alone, a person will not be penalized for loving. In fact, to love is simply human. It is his or her actions and how he/she manages the feeling that will be subjected to questioning.

Islam with all its mercy and compassion has set guidelines in this matter in order to protect the well-being of humans. The prescriptions in the Quran and hadiths are mostly preventive in nature; the Quran says 'do not approach zina (adultery or illicit sexual conducts)' instead of 'do not commit adultery'. This is because, for every calamity or problem that occurs, there will be signs and symptoms beforehand.

♥ Love is not prohibited in Islam

Love for the opposite gender is not mentioned anywhere in the Quran or hadeeth as being sinful or punishable. The holy verses instead condemn the actions which happen as a consequence of



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an uncontrollable desire. The key, therefore, is not to abolish love or shun this feeling, but to wisely manage it and channel it to the proper direction.

The Shaytan (devil) on the other hand, is always waiting for an opportunity to strike. Shaytan mischievously ‘beautifies’ and ‘glorifies’ this feeling of ‘love’, whispers ideas into the person’s head to weaken his faith and morality, exaggerates the vulnerability within his heart and makes the person eventually helpless and succumb to his desires.

One beautiful aspect of Islamic teachings is that any inner struggle (*mujaahadah an-nafs*) is considered a form of jihad (*striving for good causes*). It is one of the highest acts and Allah has promised immense rewards for those who are successful in fighting their desires. This notion of *mujaahadah* clearly points to the fact that being weak and susceptible to temptations, humans sometimes cannot avoid thinking of, or wanting to commit, sinful deeds despite their best efforts to remain sincere. This is not because they are bad or despicable. It is because they are humans.



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God acknowledges this shortcoming and does not declare this hidden weakness a sin, rather encourages humans to fight it. He teaches us the real concept of love, and provides proper channels for men to express and realize their love for the opposite gender.

The marital institution as sanctioned by God sends a clear message to humans that love is a lifelong commitment, not a means of satisfying temporary desires. The rules of the Quran like lowering of gaze, adhering to a decent dress code, avoiding unnecessary intermingling between men and women and speaking in an honorable manner are all stipulated to keep the definition of 'love' pure and uncontaminated, and preserve the chastity of humans especially youngsters.

Muslim society now holds the burden of having to educate the young generation in their pursuit of love. Turning a blind eye to pretend that the 'forbidden' form of love does not exist, or suppressing youths from expressing themselves may not help.

This vibrant, energetic group has to be nurtured well and instilled with the right understanding of love based on faith in



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God. If this is understood and grasped, all other problems become secondary.

The youths also need to be equipped with essential life skills so that they will be able to channel this feeling to the right direction and communicate with the opposite gender the right way.

Do not feel bad if you love, for to love is human. If you understand the pure concept of love, it can be a positive experience for you instead of that awkward feeling of confusion, guilt and sadness. Do not question that feeling, rather be cautious about a distorted idea that you may have about love.

Be honest with yourself if temptations begin to set in, and be reminded that fighting against worldly enticements is a commendable act. Control your love relationship with the opposite gender, and do not be controlled by your base desire before marriage. If you are sincere to seek the truth, God will show you the way.



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FINDING THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE

**When Marriage Is
Measured By Loss and
Gain**

By Selma Cook

We all hope and dream of finding the love of our life. It is a yearning that exists within the nature of humankind. Hence,



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Islam encourages marriage, and even refers to it as ‘half of our faith’.

But for the sake of sanity, let’s put away the fairy-tale dreams of prince charming and happily-ever-after and take a snapshot from reality!

As with every worthwhile thing in life, finding a loving, fulfilling relationship is hard work. And that is not the end of the story, because then one has to *maintain* a loving fulfilling relationship.

It requires a good amount of insight, self-awareness, giving, forgiving and faith that we as human beings can sometimes barely comprehend. Yet, despite its awesome intricacy, and sometimes complexity, we strive to find it.

We live in agony that we may not find it, then, when we do find it, we live in agony lest we should lose it! How pathetic we are! How much we need Allah’s help!



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♥ Snapshot

With the rising rate of unsuccessful marriages perhaps it is time we take stock of what may be going on.

I do not say ‘divorce rate’ because divorce is not the only indicator of a dysfunctional marriage; indeed, there are many marriages that are pasted together and are continuing but they are not built on the love and tranquility that Almighty Allah describes for us in His Noble Quran.

Approaching the whole idea of marriage with the attitude that this is ‘my’ right; something that ‘I’ want; and the attitude of what is this marriage going to do for ‘me’, is a big mistake.

With such an attitude the person will be unable to step back, and take an objective look at themselves, and their role in a marital relationship.

Without this kind of introspection, the marriage will very likely become dull, a routine, and a de-spiritualizing conveyor belt of human selfishness and short-sightedness. Much of the fault for



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this unhappy phenomenon lies on our shoulders; we are just not spiritual enough.

People consider marriage in terms of how it will enhance their wealth, their status and their interests. Such people become so self-focused on material and social gains that the vast spiritual aspect of the relationship is lost for them.

Ironically, they believe that a 'stable' marriage should in fact increase their wealth and social status, while the heart and the depth of the relationship, the place of true fulfillment, exists on another plane altogether.

This state of harmony, deep feelings and commitment cannot be purchased or bargained for. This is the state that people seek; this is what they mean when they say 'I have found a soulmate.' This state exists within us and between us, and our loved ones according to the state of our own individual heart.

Indeed, the heart and soul of a human being are potentially far beyond our imagination. However if they are not purified,



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discerning and alive, they will not be able to participate in deep and meaningful relationships.

♥ Soul Search

Keeping all this in mind, we become aware that our ability to be close to someone, to find harmony and, to communicate in depth as joy begins to fill our own hearts.

When the heart is free of grudge, envy, and hate, and has the ability to accept people for what they are, the heart begins to feel free and insight begins to flicker and come to life.

In this state of awareness and self- honesty, and without the harness of negativity and self-doubt, the soul can explore, appreciate and grow.

The shape of the heart changes with life events, our health, our mood and most of all, our closeness to Almighty Allah. We are probably all aware of how the soul is elated when we pray in true sincerity and concentration; this is the state of the soul that can love and be loved.



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We are also probably aware that even if we find a ‘soul mate’, one with whom we can find joy, harmony and tranquility, that this state fluctuates as is the case with human beings.

We are not constant; our faith goes up and down and our ability to love and be loved also changes.

This is where the character and good habits of the individual come shining through.

If one partner is feeling down or insecure, the other will identify the need and fill in the gap. The couple is like two elastic bands that adjust their tension according to the need so that harmony is always eventually reinstated.

The love of your life may be standing next to you right now. Your paths may have crossed, and you may have known each other for years in a public setting, but maybe you never realized the ‘heart’ of that person - the real person.

A marriage can be revived; it can find a way to grow and it can make a fresh start from a new angle. Sometimes the hearts of



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the couple have grown apart; perhaps they never tried to reach that spiritual plane where they can find rest in each other.

Making the hearts more in tune, and keeping them in tune can take a life time, but since marriage is half of our faith, is it not worth the effort?!





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WHAT LOVE CAN DO TO YOU

By Amina Cisse Muhammad

The Indian philosopher, Sri Chinmoy Ghose, is quoted as saying: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." (Cultureofpeace.org) So, exactly what is the power of love?



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♥ What Is Love?

Generally, when we speak of love, we are referring to its spiritual and emotional aspects. However, both Divine Revelation and science show a link between these, and the physical benefits of love. Let's start first with the Quran:

[And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favor upon you, for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, you became brethren...] (Aal `Imran 3:103)

[And moreover, He has put affection between their hearts; not if you had spent all that is in the earth could you have produced that affection, but Allah has done it for He is Exalted in might, Wise.] (Al-Anfal 8:63)

We know from these verses that the love that exists between believers is a favor that Allah Himself created, and that it is more valuable than anything on earth. We also know that love resides



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in the heart, a physical organ. So how is it that love resides in a physical entity?

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"There is a lump of flesh in the body that, if it is pure, the whole body is pure, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt." (Al-Bukhari)

Although he referred to the heart as a lump of flesh, when he spoke of its corruption, he was not indicating a physical quality. Rather, he was speaking of its moral and spiritual aspects.

And since we know from this hadith that impurities of the heart determine the state of the entire body, we can conclude that the spiritual and physical aspects of the heart and the body are closely linked.

♥ The Heart: Balance Between Physical & Spiritual

In her book, *The Magnificent Organ: The Heart of Quran, Hadith, Science, and Holistic Healing Experiences*, doctor of naturopathic medicine Jeanette Hablullah, states:



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... the heart is and has always been central to our physical and spiritual existence... The heart is a sign of the magnificence of our creation. It links the spiritual and the physical, the apparent and the obscure, the perceptible and the imperceptible (16-17).

Dr. Hablullah cites evidence from Quran, Hadith, and scientific studies of the link between our spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health. Regarding the electrical relationship between the brain and the heart, she says:

The Institute of Heart Math (IHM) in Boulder Creek, California... electrically recorded patterns in heart energy being affected by mental thoughts. Heart patterns that recorded as negative or damaging were calmed into healthy patterns by invoking memories of happiness, serenity, appreciation, etc. This verified change in dominant energy clearly demonstrates the interdependent nature of these two organs, as the heart reflects what you allow to dominate in your conscious mind. Here, I am going to venture beyond that concept and suggest that the heart prompts the change when the dominating energy has gone into a negative state (26-27).



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According to her understanding, physical illness is a result of a disconnected, rebellious spirit:

For those who reject and cover truth..., Allah says He seals the hearts and the hearing and places a cover over their vision. The heart will still function physically but its deeper, greater capacity to provide spiritual, conscientious guidance is gone. A physical incapacitation then is inevitable... (46-47).

Describing case studies of patients she has personally treated for heart discomfort that were discovered to be experiencing emotional difficulties, Dr. Hablullah also reports the findings of research studies that indicate that a lack of supportive family and community ties is a factor in heart disease.

She says:

The heart... is integrative. It seeks to join with other hearts, and join with the greater whole. It thrives on love, joy and connectedness (53-54).

Her recommendation to readers is:



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We must understand how we are responsible to each other and the mutual benefit that is reaped from kindness, mercy, compassion and love (57).

♥ Love and Being Loved

Mainstream medical practitioners have written about how we benefit from loving and being loved as well. Dean Ornish, medical doctor and author of several best-selling books, argues in *Love and Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy*:

Our survival depends on the healing power of love, intimacy, and relationships. Physically! Emotionally! Spiritually! As individuals! As communities! As a country! As a culture! Perhaps even as a species (1).

Dr. Ornish is a pioneer in conducting clinical research on the reversibility of disease, primarily heart disease, through diet and lifestyle changes.

In *Love and Survival*, he presents the findings of his and other studies to demonstrate that "perhaps the most powerful and meaningful intervention is love and intimacy, and the emotional



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and spiritual transformation that often results" (front cover jacket).

He also states:

Medicine today tends to focus primarily on the physical and mechanistic: drugs and surgery, genes and germs, microbes and molecules. I am not aware of any other factor in medicine — not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery — that has a greater impact on our quality of life, incidence of illness, and premature death from all causes (2-3).

After clearly stating that he has no intention of diminishing the power of diet and exercise or drugs and surgery, Ornish reports the results of studies conducted between 1979 and 1994 to examine the relationship between social isolation, and death: and disease from all causes.

Although there was considerable variation in the studies (the study communities covered the US, Amsterdam, Finland, Japan and Sweden, and there were differences in how social support



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and isolation were measured), they showed remarkably consistent results.

Those who were socially isolated had at least two to three times the risk of premature death from all causes when compared to those who had a strong sense of connection and community (41-42).

Dr. Ornish concluded from these studies that:

Love and intimacy are at a root of what makes us sick and what makes us well, what causes sadness and what brings happiness, what makes us suffer and what leads to healing. If a new drug had the same impact, virtually every doctor in the country would be recommending it for their patients. It would be malpractice not to prescribe it – yet, with few exceptions, we doctors do not learn much about the healing power of love, intimacy, and transformation in our medical training. Rather, these ideas are often ignored or even denigrated(3)

Dr. Ornish focuses on establishing a scientific basis for including (if not emphasizing) love and intimacy in disease-intervention



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measures; however, he too recognizes the non-physical aspects of the heart:

The heart is a pump that needs to be addressed on a physical level, but our hearts are more than just pumps. A true physician is more than just a plumber, technician, or mechanic. We also have an emotional heart, a psychological heart, and a spiritual heart.

Our language reflects that understanding. We yearn for our sweethearts, not our sweet pumps. Poets and musicians and artists and writers and mysticsthroughout the ages have described those that have an open heart or a closed heart; a warm heart or a cold heart, a compassionate heart or an uncaring heart. Love heals. These are metaphors, a reflection of our deeper wisdom, not just figures of speech. (11-12)

According to Ornish, "the real epidemic in our culture is not only physical heart disease, but also... emotional and spiritual heart disease — that is, the profound feelings of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and depression that are so prevalent in our culture with the breakdown of the social structures that used to provide



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us with a sense of connection and community. It is... a root of the illness, cynicism, and violence in our society" (12-13).

So you see, *Lessons from the Heart* is not purely an emotional discourse. There is actual scientific evidence that the world would benefit from greater love and caring, compassion and mercy.

Of course, we must be mindful of Islamic guidelines and injunctions as we go about fostering a movement towards greater love, but each of us can make a difference in the world by being more loving beings.

In remaining articles, we will focus on some of the specific things we can do to play a role.





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PRACTICAL CASES





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I NEED A
BOYFRIEND.
WHY NOT?

Q. Assalamoalaikum... I am having feelings for a person for about six months. I often feel like hell because he does not notice me in college at all. He does not look at any other girl. I have been taking anti-depressants recommended by a doctor because of depression symptoms. I'm in MBBS so may be this depression was a result of study pressure. I can't find out the reason of depression either him or studies. I used to think about him all day. Whenever he looks at me or notice me I feel great. I am pretty but I have a complex I am not. I need a boyfriend but as a husband just him... the last line depicts my situation.



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♥ **Counselor Dr. Maryam Bachmeier**

A. Assalam Alaykum dear sister,

You are a young woman and you are also in transition into the responsibilities of adulthood. During this time, many changes occur, both inner and outer. As a woman, your desires for relationship, (emotional, spiritual, and physical) are increasing. Likewise, your ideas about your future and how you want to live as an adult are also likely occupying your mind.

In addition to this, you may be feeling the pressure of wanting to please your parents and you also want to do well in college.

It is natural to feel some level of fear as we leave our childhood, and leave being a teenager behind and transition toward maturity as an adult woman. In fact, it is not unusual to grieve a little bit about not being a child or teenager anymore as we leave the days of innocence and become responsible and accountable for our actions.



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This is the “push pull” of young adulthood.

We want to be relieved of our duties and responsibilities, but then again, we want the privileges that come with adulthood. We know we cannot have both, and that frustrates us. **We are still dependent upon our parent for many things, but we want to have the respect that a strong experienced adult receives.**

So, yes, it is common for young adult women to become depressed. However, working through each issue that you are wrestling with will go a long way to reduce your feelings of depression. In fact, you may even be lonely.

Perhaps as you transitioned to college your network of friend has changed and your support system is not the same as it used to be. Add to that, the fact that it is natural to want to be married at your age.

We live in a time where we are emotional, physically and psychologically ready and in need of marriage as young women, but we are not able to marry successfully until we become strong



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enough academically and a career wise because we now live in an age of very complicated economic demands, and to marry as a young adult can actually jeopardize your ability to survive in today's world.

That alone is enough to make a person feel depressed! Setting all that aside, getting your education and setting the stage for a career can and will bring you much satisfaction later on, and you will be very happy that you are putting your energy into this right now, instead of looking at men, difficult as that may be.

I will be quite candid now. There is no place for “complexes” now. Not at this stage of the game. Stay focused on your studies. Your looks aren't what a good man will be after anyway, and trust me; if you keep yourself healthy, that is the “best look” any good man is after.

When you become more focused on becoming a better person, and developing your character and becoming the kind of woman that you want to be; so that when you do marry, you will be the kind of wife that you want to be, this inner beauty will send out a



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magnetic energy and attract a good, stable, responsible man who has integrity and who will treat you well.

With that said, forget about the boyfriend. **You don't need a boyfriend.** In fact, that is the LAST thing you want right now. You want to keep your focus. Men find this attractive anyway.

Let go of worrying about what other people think about you and consider what kind of person you need to be in order to attract the kind of man that you really want in your life, then relax and see what happens. **Allah will bring you the right man to fulfill the natural destiny that He put within you.** Let things unfold and try not to force things.

To work on your depression, begin by writing in a journal every day. **Write down how you are feeling,** and then try to remember the events of the day and see if you can identify the triggers that preceded the current mood that you were experiencing. For example, if you are feeling happy, try to discover what triggered that feeling/mood. If you are feeling anxious or sad, etc...do the same.



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This work is the beginning foundation of Cognitive Behavioral Change work, and you need to start there. Then you will proceed to identifying your thought and thought patterns as well as some of your basic belief systems.

One secret about depression is that people who are depressed are often dependent, vulnerable, and reactive to external events and their mood are often dictated by external events that lead to a chain of thoughts and feelings that trigger mood. So, by identifying what external events, and thoughts and beliefs start this chain of experiential inner events, you can begin to get to the root cause of your depression.

It would be wise to work with a psychotherapist who can facilitate you with this process. And this is a process that takes some time, but the work is very much worth the effort. Once you have identified these triggers, you will be able to “reprogram” your mind.

You will be able stop your negative self talk and self defeating thoughts, and replace them with positive thoughts. If you work at it hard enough and long enough, **your positive “replacement”**



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thought will actually become your new normal; your new automatic response... and you will notice that you are beginning to feel much better as well.

For now, shift your focus off of this man whom you have a crush on. The feelings are normal because you are at an age where your hormones are telling you to mate, and you likely have compatible “chemistry” that is making you attracted to him. This is nature’s way of getting men and women together. **But this is not love, and you will likely feel this way many times while you are focusing on your education and career.**

Men are usually taught about these sexual feelings and are taught about the reality that these natural feelings are not love, but rather, they are biologically based. **Men also have a kind of advantage, in that when they have a biological attraction to mate with the opposite sex, their emotions don’t always go wild on them, confusing them, and tricking them into believing that it is love.**

Although this is distracting, this phenomenon does happen to men also, just not as often. I am speaking in general terms of



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course. But generally speaking, when an adult woman becomes biologically attracted to a man of the opposite sex, her hormones also turn on her emotional zone... combine that with the fact that the women may have been trained by her culture to deny a biological attraction; she believes this is more than a crush... it must be love.

But take a REALITY CHECK and ask yourself, what do I know about this guy? What are his beliefs? What does he want out of life? What is his character? Are we compatible? Do I know him at all? PROBABLY NOT! And if you do not know a man, including what is in his heart, and mind and soul... then **you do not love him by definition; it's a crush. It will go away over time.**

So, take one day at a time, focus on your studies, and see a psychotherapist for some Cognitive Behavioral Therapy if you can. Keep putting one foot in front of the other. **You will find your life partner and ALLAH will be with you, every step of the way.**

Salam.



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CAN'T MARRY MY LOVE, HELP ME GET OVER HIM

Q. Salam 'Alaykom wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatu. I would like to share my story in sha' Allah. I have been in a relationship with a guy for almost three years. At the beginning, I just wanted to waste time and was not ready for marriage, until the guy swept me off my feet. He did everything to attract my heart, and it worked.

He's very sweet and loyal person. He's like my brother,





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my best friend and is always near me whenever I need him. One day, I asked him to proceed with this relationship by getting married. His parents refused and said there would be no way on earth we could be together. I was heartbroken and devastated.

This was the first time I gave someone my heart to. I tried to move on and accept everything that happened by the will of Allah. One sister told me that this guy was the right guy for me, but because I didn't get to know him the right way, Allah punished me. I find it very difficult to get over him.

We're still friends and get together at times but cannot control our emotions. I really want to move on, but every time I decide one way or the other, we communicate mutually. I really want to stop this, but it's hurting me deeply, because I feel like he's the closest person in my life. I'm so attached to him. What shall I do? Please help as I don't want to fall into the same trap again. Jazakallah Khair.

♥ **Counselor Aliah Azmeh (3)**

A. Wa 'Alaykum As-Salaam dear sister,



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Thank you for sending us your question. It appears that you are heartbroken from recently having to end a three-year relationship. I ask Allah to help you be patient and reflective through this difficult time, and to give you strength to believe in yourself and move on with positive energy.

From your question, it seems like you know exactly what to do in order to move on with your life when you say: *“I really want to move on, but every time I decide one way or the other, we communicate mutually.”*

What you need to do is to stop all communication with this man. Delete his number from your phone, “unfriend” him from any social networks you may be a part of (like Facebook, MySpace, etc.), avoid the places he hangs out in, alert your friends that you are no longer seeing this person, and start forming a life away from him.

You absolutely need this time to clear your mind and reflect on the choices you have made and their consequences. In order to do that, you need to stay away from distractions that will pull you away from yourself and keep you emotionally and spiritually



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dependent on this man. This first step is the most difficult one, because it is the most crucial one! It is very easy to give into your desires and tell yourself “I will only see him this last time” or “even though we aren’t together we can still be friends.” The truth is if you tell yourself those things, you will only be fooling yourself. Deep down inside, you really want to be with this man, but you are ignoring the fact that you can’t be together.

You will remain “stuck” and then you will start to believe that your happiness and self-worth relies completely on this man being part of your life, and that is far from the truth. **Do not allow yourself to be a victim of your own desires. Stand up for yourself and regain control of who you are. You can be a happy and whole person without him.**

After you have taken the time and effort to stop all contact with this man by various means, **take time to focus on yourself and reflect on the positive and negative aspects of your relationship with him.** You mentioned that from the start of this relationship, you never intended to have a serious one, but you started to become more and more attached to him until you depended on him to make you happy. Once you got to that point, you asked



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him to make things official by getting married. His parents refused, and thus force you to end this relationship, because it will never reach its full potential.

When you look back into this experience, understand that in the future, you should look for a potential husband who not only meets your qualifications and expectations, but who is serious about commitment and marriage.

As I mentioned before, take this time to take care of yourself and understand that this difficult time will pass. Remember to cut all ties with this man, surround yourself with people who love and care about you such as friends and family, and focus on your own development and life goals.

In sha' Allah, when time is ready for you, marriage will come your way, but the next time around, you will make different choices.

I ask Allah to grant you the strength and courage to discover your full potential and to withstand this difficulty.



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CHAPTER TWO SEX IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES





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'GOOD MUSLIMS DON'T THINK ABOUT SEX'

By Umm Zakiyyah

“You won’t believe what just happened,” the assistant teacher, who was elder to me and had immigrated to America from a predominantly Muslim country, said as she entered the staff room of the Muslim school where I worked.





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The other teachers and I smiled knowingly as we looked toward her. We had grown accustomed to the comical stories that happened daily between teachers and students, especially in the elementary section.

“The teacher asked the second-grade girls what they want to be when they grow up,” the assistant teacher continued as she pulled out a chair and sat down at the table where we were sitting. “And one-by-one, each girl talked about what she wanted to be.”

We chuckled, anticipating that one of the students had said something the teacher hadn’t expected.

“Some girls said, ‘I want to be a doctor when I grow up,’” the assistant teacher said, mimicking the child-like voice of the students. “Some said, ‘I want to be a nurse,’ and one girl said, ‘I want to be a firefighter.’”

“And then one girl said the strangest thing,” the assistant teacher said. We grew quiet, light smiles on our faces as we awaited the punch line to the story. The assistant teacher twisted



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her face and raised her voice slightly to underscore the oddity of the girl's statement: "When I grow up," she mocked, "I want to be a mommy."

There was laughter from me and other teachers. "Aww, *maashaAllah*," I said, still smiling. "That's so cute." Other teachers nodded in agreement and shared the same sentiment.

"Cute?" the assistant teacher repeated as she glared at me, her eyebrows furrowed in disapproval. The darkness of her expression quieted me, as it did the others, and we looked at her in confusion.

My smile faded as I met the woman's gaze and searched my mind for what I had said wrong. "Yes," I said tentatively, thinking perhaps the assistant teacher had misunderstood me. "That's really cute that she wants to be like her mother."

"No," the assistant teacher disagreed, her face contorted as she looked pointedly at me. "That's not cute. That's *disgusting*."



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Silence fell on the staff room at the intensity of her last word. Even those who were not participating in the conversation stopped their own discussions to turn toward us.

“If she wants to be a mommy when she grows up,” the assistant teacher said, disgust still in her voice, “all she’ll do every day is think about sex.”

Though it has been nearly ten years since the discussion, I remember the conversation in the staff room as if it were yesterday. I remember how no matter how much I, as well as others, tried to explain to the woman that the little girl’s dream had nothing at all to do with sex, the woman was persistent: the poor little girl had been so corrupted by “American thinking” that her only dreams for the future lay in fantasizing about sex day after day until she could bring it into fruition by becoming a mother in real life.

At that time, I was speechless in shock. Did this woman really imagine that a seven-year-old girl’s desire to be a mother came from anything other than a pure, innocent admiration of the girl’s own mother?



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“Well,” the assistant teacher said to me in frustration at the end of the conversation, “either you have *hayaa*’ [modesty or a sense of shame] or you don’t.”

I stared at her in disbelief. Was she saying what I thought she was?

“And if you don’t have *hayaa*’,” she said, “there’s no way for you to understand where I’m coming from.”

My mouth fell open, and even some of the teachers from the woman’s home country spoke up in disagreement with her.

The assistant teacher shrugged smugly. “That’s the problem with Americans. They don’t have *hayaa*.”

“You can’t say that,” some teachers protested, shaking their heads emphatically in disagreement.

“Oh really?” the woman said, her voice suggesting that she would prove to all of us that Americans had absolutely no modesty or sense of shame.



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“There was one American woman who was Muslim,” the assistant teacher said, “and when she was pregnant, she actually told her children!”

Some of us laughed at the ridiculousness of the assistant teacher’s perspective.

“And do you know what she did?” the assistant teacher asked, her tone suggesting that this would surely make us understand. “She let her child touch her stomach and feel the baby moving.”

Silence fell in the staff room. Was this woman serious?

“And what’s wrong with that?” I asked.

“Because now the child is going to be thinking about her parents having sex!”

♥ Let’s Not Talk About Sex

I left the staff room that day in a daze. I could not fathom what cultural and personal experiences could lead a person to obsess about staying away from the topic of sex so much that she saw it



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in places where it wasn't present at all...and then imagined that her phobia of sex was actually an indication of a high level of modesty and Islamic spirituality.

"I'm an indigenous American," I told the woman that day, "and most of my extended family are Christians. I went to public school and heard and saw many inappropriate things," I said. "But I'm telling you, I've never in my life heard of an American thinking that a little girl wanting to be a mother or parents telling their child they're expecting a baby has anything at all to do with sex."

I shook my head. "If anything," I said, "it shows how your culture obsesses about sex."

♥ How Did We Come to This?

I wish I could say that the conversation with the assistant teacher was the last time I heard Islamic modesty connected with avoiding the topic of sex at all costs. But it wasn't. Time after time I continued to hear about "let's not talk about sex" so much that I felt as if I'd never heard sex talked about as much as it was



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from the “anti-sex” Muslim circles. In Islamic classes, in fatwas, in discussions of women’s dress—you name it—these Muslims couldn’t get enough of discussing how to not think about sex, which of course meant that they thought about it more than the average person.

I myself have left certain Muslim classes and religious gatherings to protect myself from the corruption I feared I would suffer if I remained around such immodest, inappropriate thinking in the name of “Islamic modesty.”

“My goodness! Who thinks of such things?” I found myself often saying after hearing of yet another way Muslims should dress or carry themselves [that went far beyond what Allah commanded], just to avoid inciting others to think about sex.

How did we come to this?

Only Allah knows. But my experiences in different Muslim cultures and communities in America and abroad have given me a glimpse into what might be happening to this ummah as it relates



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to the beautiful blessing that Allah has given the husband and wife in the form of sex and intimacy...





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ISLAM, WOMEN AND SEX: DO WE OVERDO THINGS?

By Raudah Mohd Yunus**

I was deeply amused by Umm Zakiyyah's recently published article entitled 'Good Muslims Don't Think About Sex'. The absurd reaction shown by the assistant teacher against an innocent little girl's dream 'to be a mommy' is a good





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and practical reminder to us that, in reality, there are still many Muslims out there who tend to overdo things and therefore hold such views.

I encountered a more or less identical experience during my teen years. Having been naive and young at that time, I became a victim of ignorance, believing that anything to do with sex was Islam's greatest enemy and that as good Muslims, we had to suppress as much as possible any elements that could possibly bring sex into imagination or discussion. In most of the cases, women were the easiest and most vulnerable targets and scapegoats.

After leaving high school, I joined a short pre-university course at a local institution. Since it was a transit for further studies in the Arab world, all other participants came from a so-called religious educational background or religious schools.

I was the only one from a mainstream public school and without any formal Arabic language qualification. The only reason that made me end up there was purely interest and a newly discovered passion in Islam.



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At a first glance, things appeared innocent enough, with the students displaying the typical enthusiastic 'Islamic' appearance: girls in their long hijab (called 'tudung' in Bahasa) and guys mostly in their small, white hats (called 'kopiah'), which are usually a sign of piety or religiosity in our culture. I had long dreamed of having such Godly companions in life and so was very excited in the first few weeks. I must be in the right path, I told myself and my excessive eagerness to be 'good' made me observe them so closely in admiration, and cling to their every word.

♥ All That Glitters Is Not Gold

A month or so passed by and I began to sense something wrong. Some of these 'Islamic' students, especially the guys, were overdoing things. At first, I thought I was the one with insufficient Islamic knowledge and so it was better to keep my mouth shut, but with each day, I found my natural instinct as a human rebelling against their seemingly 'Islamic' practices.

In the class, we were indirectly told that Muslim girls were not supposed to be too active or vocal; asking the lecturer too many



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questions was inappropriate because pious Muslim girls should be quiet. Voice was an 'aurah' and could provoke sexual thoughts and so, keeping quiet was the safest thing.

If a friend of mine stood in front to present something, some guys would boo her and mock her from behind. If one of us talked too loudly by mistake, they would send us a note, giving a short religious sermon of how a Muslim girl should behave.

Delving deep into the issue to quench my thirst for the truth, I discovered that all those absurd ideas were shared directly or indirectly by the very teachers teaching in the so-called religious schools or madrasahs.

Girls especially, were brainwashed first into believing that they were the source of all evils and sexual misconducts and therefore, they had to be under control, to salvage humankind. Few friends shared with me their awkward experience at different Islamic schools where male students were so dominant and girls were constantly suppressed; the dress code was always very strict for girls. A slightest deviation from the standard code would render a female student's reputation and honor at stake.



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In one famous school, girls were expected to dress in certain colors: black, grey, white. In short, any dull color. Other colors or colorful dresses were considered sexually arousing and so forbidden. Trousers were a taboo, for the same reason. Red trousers were especially banned because they could be tempting to male students!

♥ This Is Not Islam

What had gotten into these people's minds? *This could not be true*, I kept telling myself. Nor does Islam support such ideas.

Of course, Islam emphasizes decency and chastity, forbids excessive and unnecessary mingling between men and women, and it prescribes a decent dress code for both men and women. But to interpret everything in Islam from a sexual point of view and to think that men-women relation was all and only about sex was a sign of ignorance. To treat women in such a way that they could not even express themselves or choose what color of dress they could wear, even while following the Islamic dress code, was a sign of danger and extremism.



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Worse was the fact that those male students were actually in delusion and terrible deception; thinking that, as males, they were naturally created as sexual beings and would immediately lose sanity at the very sight of women. If I were a male, I would in fact feel insulted to be perceived as sexual beasts that needed to control women in order to be in the right mind. A real Muslim man is surely higher than that!

I flew to Egypt months later and the same degree of confusion lingered around, if not worse. This time I came across a group of female students who literally put stones in their mouths while talking to men from behind the curtain. I asked why. They said the real female voice should not be heard as it could cause sexual excitement and corrupt men's mind.

They read out a Qur'anic verse where God told the wives of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, not to speak in a soft and pleasing manner so as not to open any possible doors of evil for weak men. Some of them wore very big and loose long gowns with several layers of clothing inside in order to make sure that the body shape was not revealed.



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To be more precise, it was not to conceal the body shape, but to make the body look bigger and a bit fatter than its actual size. Stories of rape and sexual harassment were commonly circulated among the female students to cause fear and hinder them from travelling without mahram or male representatives.

My multiple attempts to negotiate with myself to accept and neutralize their arguments miserably failed despite my newly-found craving for Islam. I realized most people were not thinking enough and hence, the easy inclination towards excessiveness. Living in a small community, which not only condoned but promoted those ideas, the short cut was to accept what other people had been following rather than to go against the flow.

I was no expert, but my simple understanding of the Islamic spirit and the faith I had in God somehow told me that Islam taught wisdom, simplicity, moderation and common sense. One does not have to overdo things to be pious on one hand, while oversimplifying is equally a blunder, on the other hand. It is the perfect and beautiful balance between the two that makes Islam appealing and practical for the whole of humankind.



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Many ill-informed Muslims think that, by being very strict and harsh, they get closer to God. This is how negative qualities like being judgmental, overly suspicious and hatred or discrimination against women are bred.

This misconception also opens various doors to elements of extremism and subsequently, unwarranted retaliation and ill feelings, which eventually provoke enemies of Islam to ridicule the religion. While it is not true that Islam treats its women as passive, suppressed and dependent beings, there is sadly some truth in claims that some Muslim men and some ignorant Muslim communities handle women that way.

Perhaps if we can rediscover common sense, moderation and wisdom, which I believe have always been at the core of Islamic teachings, many doors of fallacy and mistaken belief about Islam will be automatically removed without us having to endlessly explain or apologize too much.



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IS SEXUAL ATTRACTION A SIN?

By *Umm Zakiyyah*

“As you grow,” my father said, “your bodies will start to change.”

Listening attentively, my brothers, sisters, and I sat on the carpet of the living room opposite to our parents. It was just after dawn, and we were all having the morning class that my parents held for us each day after Fajr, the first of the five daily prayers.





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“And as your bodies change,” he said, “the boys and girls at school will start to look really good to you.” There were a few suppressed giggles and shy glances from the younger ones. “And you’ll begin to feel different things happening inside you.. And when this happens,” my father said, “be thankful to Allah. This means you are healthy and that Allah is preparing your body to enjoy your husband or wife when you get married.”

As early as I can remember, this morning class was part of my family’s daily routine. My mother would get up early in the morning and come to our rooms to wake me up, including my brothers and sisters, to let us know it was time to pray. Sometimes, if we were feeling lazy or resistant, she would sprinkle water on our faces; then we would crawl out of bed, often still with our blankets wrapped around us, and we’d drag ourselves to the bathroom for *wudhoo’*, the ritual ablution in preparation for prayer.

After praying Fajr as a family, my father—or occasionally one of the older children—would read some verses from the Qur’an, and we would each share our reflections on the reading and how it could benefit us practically in our lives, even though we were



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only four or five years old. Then my father and mother would discuss different topics that they felt would help us cope with challenges in public school and with what we'd likely face later in life.

Though we didn't quite grasp it at the time, one day, we had a topic on sex and marriage. My father and mother talked to us about how the physical desires we felt for the opposite sex were not only natural and healthy, but blessings for which we should be grateful to Allah. They told us that there was nothing wrong or shameful in these desires or feelings—even if we were attracted to someone who was not permissible for us at the time—because physical desires themselves are not sinful, they said. It was only a question of how you responded to them, which determined whether it'd be right or wrong.

‘You Have No Right to Mention Marriage’

I think my first real culture shock regarding how many Muslims view sex and marriage came when I became, for the first time, part of a Muslim community that was made up primarily of



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people who had migrated to the US from predominantly Muslim countries.

Previously, most of my interactions on a community level had been with fellow indigenous Americans. But now, as a full-time teacher in a Muslim school in a culturally diverse community, it's become clear to me that not all Muslims view sex and intimacy as my parents had taught me—or even how Islam teaches.

“I don’t agree with what you’re teaching the girls,” an angry mother, who also happened to be a teacher herself (albeit of a much younger group than my middle school class), said to me as she stopped me in the hall one day.

I creased my forehead in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“The books you’re making them read,” she said. “They’re completely inappropriate.”

I had to suppress laughter, as I was so shocked at the ridiculousness of her accusation; not because I didn’t agree with her, but because I wasn’t “making” the students read anything.



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The state's education department had certain requirements for accredited schools, and the county curriculum that the Muslim school was using provided us with a list of "required reading" to choose from. And I, with the help of an administrator, had gone through the list and chose the books that, to the best of our determination, contained the least amount of inappropriate material. And the book we'd settled on for that month was the classic *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott.

I explained this to the woman as best I could, and I told her that the way I customarily dealt with any inappropriate content in the curriculum was to include in my lesson the proper Islamic perspective on the issue. If any discussion of physical attraction or love occurred in the books, I told her, I would simply explain to the students that though these feelings are natural and healthy, they are to be expressed fully only in marriage.

"You have no right to mention marriage to them," she said.

What? I think my confused expression said what I could not.



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“In my country, we don’t know anything about these things,” she said as if in reprimand. “When I got married, I knew nothing, I mean absolutely nothing.” She smiled slightly. “And my husband liked that. He had to teach me everything.”

I began to feel a bit uncomfortable with the conversation shift, but I tried not to show it.

“So it’s not right to discuss these things,” she said.

“You mean ever?” I said, genuinely surprised that a Muslim parent would purposefully avoid discussing the topic of physical attraction and marriage with her young adult children.

“Ever,” she said.

“But...” I said, hoping to keep my voice as respectful as possible. “What about what Allah says about intimacy and marriage in the Qur’an, or what the Prophet, *sallallahu’alayhi wa sallam*, said about it in hadith? Are we supposed to skip the verses and hadith on this topic?”



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“We don’t have to discuss these things,” she said. “They can read the Qur’an, but we don’t have to explain everything to them.”

Is Sexual Attraction A Sin?

It took repeated experiences like the ones I discussed here and in Part 1, before I had this epiphany: **Many Muslims think sexual attraction itself is sinful.** Thus, these Muslims equate avoiding the topics of sex and marriage with being spiritually “pure” and “righteous.” However, in practical reality, this approach translates into multitudes of Muslim youth being thrust into utter confusion, shame, and dismay when they reach puberty and have feelings and desires that they can make absolutely no sense of...

Except that their desires and stimulating dreams are eerily similar to all the “*haram* (religiously forbidden)” videos, television shows, and movies that “good Muslims” don’t watch.

♥ Sexual Ignorance Is Not Righteousness

If we wish to raise our children as truly “good Muslims”, we can start by treating them, especially our young adults, as we ask them to treat us: respectfully. And respect begins with looking at



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them as we should view all human beings: as individuals who are ultimately responsible for their own bodies and souls—and for whom our duty is primarily to convey Allah’s Message—in full.

Allah says,

“O Messenger! Proclaim [the Message] which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And if you do not, then you have not conveyed His Message...”

—Al-Maa’idah (5:67)

If this is Allah’s command to the Prophet (*sallallahu’alayhi wa sallam*), our example, why then do we think our responsibility is different as it relates to what the Islam teaches us about physical desires, sex, and marriage? Yes, these topics can inspire discomfort and awkward questions. But we cannot allow our personal and cultural misgivings to keep us from loving and respecting our children as Allah instructed us to.

So let’s give our children the opportunity to practice Islam with proper knowledge and righteousness, particularly as it relates to



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their natural sexual desires that make them healthy young adults being prepared for the blessing and joy of marital intimacy...

Because **good Muslims do think about sex**—in the way that Allah has taught them to.





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RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE DON'T HAVE DESIRES?

By Umm Zakiyyah

I remember when I first read the story of the marriage of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the divorced wife of his adopted son Zaid ibn Haritha, may Allah be pleased with them.

Although I was relatively young when I happened





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upon this story, I was deeply moved. I remember thinking how beautiful it was that the Prophet was able to put Allah before anything else, even in his inclination to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh.

It wasn't until years later that I realized that the account that I had read of Prophet Muhammad and Zaynab (which reported that the Prophet felt a personal inclination to marry Zaynab after Zaid divorced her) was disputed amongst Muslim scholars regarding its authenticity.

The scholars explained that because the marriage of the Prophet to Zaynab was a command from Allah, it is incorrect to assert that the Prophet had any feelings for Zaynab whatsoever prior to marriage. Some scholars even stated that this version of the story was fabricated by non-Muslim orientalist who wished to destroy the honor and integrity of the Prophet by attributing to him any physical attraction to Zaynab.

“It is blasphemous to accuse the Prophet of desiring Zaynab!” they said. “He was just worried about what people would think if he married the divorced wife of his adopted son because that was against Arab custom.”



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Yes, undoubtedly, the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab was a command from Allah to clarify that adopted sons should not be viewed as blood sons regarding the impermissibility of marrying a son's former wife, and naturally, due to Arab custom regarding adopted sons, the Prophet was concerned about how people would view this marriage.

But, I remember being utterly confused. I couldn't fathom why it would be considered blasphemy to believe that the Prophet was attracted to Zaynab after Zaid divorced her. And why was obeying the command of Allah mutually exclusive to natural human attraction?

It appeared to me that the underlying issue was that the alleged blasphemy was in believing that prophets experienced physical attraction or desire prior to marriage, and this baffled me.

Is Desire Unbecoming of Prophets?

Allah says to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him:



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“Not lawful to you, [O Muhammad], are [any additional] women after [this],nor [is it] for you to exchange them for [other] wives even if their beauty were to please you...” —Al-Ahzaab (33:52)

Furthermore, regarding the famous story of Prophet Yusuf and the plot of the women, Allah says:

“He said, ‘My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me.

And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant.’” —Yusuf (12:33)

If desire itself is unbecoming of prophets, why did Allah mention to the Prophet that the prohibition on marrying more wives remains “even if their beauty were to please you”? Furthermore, what then was the severe struggle that Prophet Yusuf is referring to that inspired him to desire prison lest he fall victim to it, and that he feared he might incline toward?

True Honor Is in Overcoming Difficulty, Not in Never Facing It



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By removing even the possibility of natural human desire from prophets' existence, we have inadvertently lowered their status while raising ours to a level higher than theirs. After all, it is well known that the one who must overcome difficulty is of a much higher status than the one who doesn't experience it in the first place.

This is one explanation for why believers will ultimately enjoy a status even higher than angels. We as humans have the option to fall short in obeying Allah; angels don't. Thus, our obedience is more remarkable and praiseworthy in the sight of Allah.

Why then do we remove from prophets the human honor borne of struggle?

The Prophet was once asked,

“O Messenger of Allah, which people are tested most severely?”
The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said,
“They are the prophets, then the next best, then the next best. A man is tried according to his religion. If he is firm in his religion,



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then his trials will be more severe, and if he is weak in religion, then he is tried according to his strength in religion.

The servant will continue to be tried until he is left walking upon the earth without any sin” (Sunan At-Tirmidhi 2398, graded sahih by At-Tirmidhi).

Why then do we view it as “unbecoming” or “blasphemous” for the severe trials of a prophet to include the trial that nearly every man and woman faces on earth, that of being attracted to the opposite sex?

Although it is undeniable that the Prophet, peace be upon him, married Zaynab only in obedience to Allah’s command, why is the mere *possibility* of his being attracted to her after the divorce viewed as slanderous or blasphemous?

Rather, what would be slanderous or blasphemous is to suggest that a prophet crossed any moral boundaries, married for selfish reasons, or acted *purely* on attraction alone.



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♥ Righteous People Don't Have Desires?

Today, many Muslims view physical desire as “sick”, filthy, and unbecoming of those who “truly” love Allah. This is possibly, why we can't imagine any righteous person, let alone a prophet, having desires at all.

In a hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said,

“Surely, you will follow the ways of those nations who were before you, in everything as one arrow resembles another (i.e. just like them), so much so that even if they entered a hole of a sand-lizard, you would enter it.” The Companions said, “O Messenger of Allah! Do you mean to say that we will follow the Jews and the Christians?” He replied, “Who else?”

And today, it seems that this lizard hole is our view of physical attraction between men and women.

In the Catholic church, the highest post for a man (that of Pope) is given to one who neither marries nor engages in any sexual intimacy; and the holy women (the nuns) are those who vow



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celibacy for life, thus shunning any desires, even in the sanctity of marriage.

Yet, no such “honor” exists in Islam. In fact, in the Sunnah, this is considered a form of extremism. Why then are we allowing similar beliefs to enter our minds and hearts?

Yes, most Muslims acknowledge that the Prophet had desires *after* marriage, but many view it as slanderous to believe he had attraction *before* marriage—even toward women he proposed to and wanted to marry.

Yet, in the famous account of Juwairiyah bint al-Harith first meeting the Prophet, Ayesha is reported to have immediately disliked seeing Juwairiyah because she was extremely beautiful, and Ayesha spoke of the Prophet also seeing her:

“I knew he would see what I saw [i.e. her beauty]” (Abu Dawud).

Unfortunately, in our zeal to defend the character of the Prophet, we deny his humanity. So many of us wish to believe that his marriages were inspired “purely” by higher goals of freeing slaves, making peace between warring tribes, and



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eradicating tribalism and racism. And although these higher goals certainly existed, it is odd to view them as mutually exclusive to physical attraction or desire.

When I hear claims like these, I often wonder, “What woman of today would view it as praiseworthy if her husband was not the least bit attracted to her prior to marriage?”

Why then do we find this preferable or “honorable” for the Mothers of Believers?

♥ Our Self-Serving Definitions of Righteousness

In truth, many of our assertions about “righteousness” and the Prophet’s alleged lack of physical desire are made for selfish reasons: Often, Muslims today simply wish to deny obvious parts of their faith, namely the permissibility, and possible praiseworthiness, of a man marrying more than one wife.

And given that the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is in obvious contradiction to this view, we wriggle out of blameworthiness by claiming that the Prophet didn’t marry for the reasons other men marry (i.e. due to physical attraction).



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Thus, any man who is attracted to a woman (especially if he is already married) has committed a “crime,” even if it culminates in the honorable institution of marriage as sanctioned by Allah.

♥ Honesty Is True Righteousness

Speaking the truth is something that is an important virtue in all faiths, so it is undeniable that true Islamic righteousness is in being honest with ourselves and with the world.

And a good place to start is concerning the remarkable beauty and mercy in Allah allowing men and women to be physically attracted to each other such that we find immense joy and pleasure in each other after marriage.

And what better reflection of righteousness is there than being grateful for these favors?



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MUSLIM GIRLS DON'T WANT SEX?

By Umm Zakiyyah

'Then, She Slapped Me'

"I remember when I was watching television as a child," my friend told me, "and there was a wedding scene on TV, and I got excited so I pointed to the screen and said, 'Look, Mommy! They're getting married.' Then, she slapped me."



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In my friend's culture, sex is such a taboo subject that even the mention of marriage is frowned upon, especially amongst girls.

"So it's unthinkable to say you want to get married," she said, bitter sarcasm traceable in her tone. "In my country, a good girl never wants marriage."

My friend, the daughter of Muslim immigrants to America, shook her head, clearly perplexed by a culture she was connected to by blood but so far removed from in her heart and mind that she had difficulty reconciling that it had anything to do with her. "It's sad," she said. "It's really sad."

♥ A sexual "Good" Muslims

Many Muslims would view my friend's culture as "backwards" and "un-Islamic" with regard to how it views women and marriage, and I can't say I disagree. But what about our own views of marriage and intimacy when it comes to our daughters and other Muslim youth?

Even in the West, many Muslim parents cringe at the thought of discussing intimacy with their children, especially their



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daughters—despite these same “children” sitting in front of sensual advertisements, watching sexually suggestive content on television (and in video games), and listening to music that leaves very little to the imagination.

What’s more is that many of these Muslim youth attend public (or non-Muslim) schools, where the subject of sex is not at all absent from male-female social interaction and where the curriculum regularly includes the topic of sex (and is not limited to heterosexuality).

Unfortunately, the message that many Muslim youth gather from this confusing existence is that in “Muslim culture,” being a “good person” means being asexual, not only to the extent that you don’t have physical desires, but that you pretend no one does—even your own parents who happen to be married with children.

Thus, in the minds of many Muslim youth, marriage becomes a perfunctory “duty” that you fulfill “when you grow up,” and sexual desire or pleasure plays little to no role in the union.



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♥ Double Lives of Muslim Youth

“I may as well have fun now,” one Muslim girl said in defense of her sinful life with a non-Muslim boyfriend. “I won’t after I get married.”

When I ask Muslim youth why they assume they’ll have no fun after marriage, many say that their parents don’t care about compatible mates for them and that their parents will just marry them off to someone with money and status, even if they aren’t even attracted to each other.

“But can’t you just say no?” I ask.

“Not really,” one young woman said. “Because if you do, it’ll cause so many problems in the family that it’s not worth it. I already accept that I won’t have any say in who I’d marry, so I don’t even think about it.”

Not surprisingly, this young woman has chosen the “double life” culture that adheres to the asexual “good Muslim” culture at home, and the open intermingling outside the home (which



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includes having a secret boyfriend she hopes her parents never learn about).

♥ ‘We Don’t Need Marriage Anymore’

“Today, we don’t have to worry about widows and divorced women getting married,” the woman told me. “They have job opportunities and a social welfare system to take care of them.” The woman had been married for more than twenty years and lived a comfortable life as a homemaker to a man she loved dearly. “Polygamy was for the past, when there weren’t any options for single women,” she said. “Now we don’t need it anymore.”

When I hear statements like these (as I do often), I wonder what the woman would think if her husband announced that he would spend no more time with her (emotionally or intimately) and that he would only send her money and make sure her bills were paid.

“Today, we don’t have to worry about making our wives happy,” he could say. “They have television and internet to entertain themselves. Marital intimacy was for the past, when there



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weren't any other options for married women," he could argue. "Now we don't need it anymore."

♥ Our Needs Are Less Than Animals?

It's quite astounding to hear arguments about why youth and divorced women should pursue fulfillment in matters other than marriage—as if satisfaction in worldly accomplishments is somehow mutually exclusive to a satisfying marital relationship. And ironically, these arguments usually come from men and women who are married themselves. This begs the question, what is really going on here?

Do we really imagine that by creating asexual home environments for our daughters and other youth that their natural desires will somehow disappear, and they can now focus on “more important” things?

Do we really imagine that by providing only food, clothing, and shelter to widows and divorced women that all their needs in life are met, and they can live locked away from intimate interaction with the opposite sex—forever?



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Amazingly, even activists for the rights of *animals* decry such thinking concerning dogs, cats, and wild beasts. How could a human being, let alone a Muslim, suggest such a lifestyle for a fellow human being—especially when it’s a lifestyle they don’t accept for themselves?

♥ Muslim Girls Don’t Want Sex?

“Boys have needs,” parents often say, and the underlying implication, is that we should shut our eyes and turn the other way when boys fulfill them (even if they’re not married). Perhaps this sort of thinking is why in some religious circles; it is viewed as an urgency to get “eligible” and divorced men married off as soon as possible—while young adult girls and divorced women need only to be “distracted” and provided for.

Not surprisingly, the idea that Muslim girls don’t (or shouldn’t) have sexual needs of their own is most common in misogynistic societies (and families) where a female is not viewed as a whole human being with individual needs and desires of her own. She is rather been viewed as a commodity to be “given away” when an eligible man wants “something” to fulfill his needs. And if no



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eligible man requires the girl's "services," then she has no "need" to get married.

As I advise and talk to Muslim youth and divorced women struggling in cultural mindsets like these (even in America), my heart aches, and I wonder how something as beautiful as marital intimacy has been reduced to something so "unthinkable"? How come to merely mention the admiration of the bond can risk a girl being slapped—by the very woman who conceived her as a result of marital intimacy itself?





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LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

By Umm Zakiyyah

“In my family,” my colleague told me proudly, “we had so much *hayaa*’ that my mother and all the girls would come to every prayer, even when we were menstruating. If we couldn’t pray, we would get dressed for prayer and sit in the row behind the men so that when our father and brothers finish praying, they would see us sitting there and have no idea that we weren’t able to pray because of our menses.”





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Hayaa' is an Arabic word that is often translated as modesty, but it has the broader meaning of "a respectable sense of shame." In Islam, true *hayaa'* does not involve women being ashamed of their normal bodily functions nor does it involve women putting on pretenses to appease males or to maintain a false image. But unfortunately, in many cultures of predominately Muslim countries, the term has been so misconstrued that not only does it refer almost exclusively to the actions of women, it also defies the guidelines of Islam itself.

Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Faith (Belief) consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And Haya (This term "Haya" covers a large number of concepts which are to be taken together; amongst them are self-respect, modesty, bashfulness, and scruple, etc.) is a part of faith." (Bukhari)

♥ Abandoning False Modesty: We Are All New Muslims

Perhaps, one effective way to overcome the false modesty that is rampant in many Muslim families and communities is for us all to



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embrace the idea that, on some level, we are all learning about Islam for the first time. Whether we accepted Islam on our own or were born into a Muslim family, living as a Muslim must be a conscious choice.

Thus, if Muslims genuinely wish to live according to the guidelines of Islam, we must take time to study the religion for ourselves and filter from our minds and hearts false teachings, whether the falsehood came from anti-Muslim media propaganda or from the sincere efforts of our parents and cultural community who thought they were teaching us Islam.

♥ Talking Sex: Embracing True Hayaa'

Sex is likely the most misunderstood subject pertaining to *hayaa'* in Islam. Perhaps the misunderstanding has occurred because by nature sex is such an intimately private act, or perhaps the misunderstanding has occurred because when sex is engaged in outside the marriage bond, personal and social disasters can result, thus making sex one of the most feared and avoided topics in many Muslim communities.



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However, the one whose very life embodied Islamic *hayaa* in the most exemplary form, Prophet Muhammad himself, did not fear or avoid this subject. In fact, in an effort to teach the proper understanding of this subject and the Islamic guidelines of physical and spiritual purity, he customarily discussed sex with both men and women, even when both men and women were present.

Concerning men's sexual intimacy with women, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

“When anyone sits amidst four parts (of the woman) and the circumcised parts touch each other a bath becomes obligatory”. (Bukhari and Muslim).

Also, the Companions of the Prophet customarily asked about this subject, as in the famous narration when Umar ibn al-Khattab asked the Prophet about entering a woman from behind (through her vaginal area), and Allah revealed a verse on the subject (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, 2980).



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Additionally, the female Companions also asked the Prophet about this subject. The female Companion Umm Sulaym said, “O Messenger of Allah, surely, Allah is not shy of the truth. Is it necessary for a woman to take a ritual bath after she has a wet dream?” The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) replied, “Yes, if she notices a discharge.”

The female Companion Umm Salama then covered her face and asked, “O Messenger of Allah! Does a woman have a discharge?” He replied: “Yes, let your right hand be in dust, how does the son resemble his mother?” (Bukhari).

If Allah, His Messenger, and the male and female Companions were not shy to discuss truth, even in the subject of sex, why then are we? Do we imagine that our personal and cultural *hayaa*’ is greater than their personal and spiritual *hayaa*’?

♥ Glorified Ignorance and the Dangers of False Modesty

“I thought I was dying,” my friend told me as she recalled her first menses. “I had no idea what was happening to me.” Another friend told me how a family member ran from her



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husband on wedding night because she had absolutely no idea what he wanted from her and why he was removing his clothes.

One of my female teenage students asked me, “Why do some girls sit outside the prayer area when it’s time to pray? And what are pads for? What do you do with them?” And this student already had the physical signs of puberty, which means she could start menstruating literally at any moment.

Though some of us might find these incidents “cute” or funny, the truth is that they represent a very dangerous trend of “glorified ignorance” in some Muslim communities. The glorified ignorance trend defines modesty as an exclusively female trait, and the more ignorant a woman is about her body and sexuality, the more revered and “evident” her modesty is. However, men are expected to be anything but modest, often to the extent that they are expected and even encouraged to blatantly disobey Allah’s command to come not even close to *zina* (fornication or adultery).

What has resulted is cultures of controlled, subjugated, and oppressed women, where the honor of the family or tribe rests



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with the “glorified ignorance” and asexuality of the women adhering to cultural codes of modesty.

But even in members of these cultures who have immigrated to the West and sought to abandon misogynistic definitions of honor and modesty, the negative effects of culturally-reinforced false modesty continue to disrupt marriages.

Often, both men and women remain sexually unsatisfied because while a woman’s ignorance of her body and sexuality might be sexually arousing to some men on wedding night, this glorified ignorance gets old and tiresome over time, especially for those who wish to stay within the limits set by Allah and derive sexual satisfaction from only their spouse.

Tragically, the women themselves suffer psychologically, as many feel ashamed of their sexual desires and view it as “inappropriate” to speak about what arouses them or to initiate any sexual contact.

Unmarried girls (and sometimes boys) from cultures that glorify ignorance often pray while they are in *janaabah* (a state of ritual



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impurity) because when they have a wet dream, they have no idea they need to make *ghusl* before praying. Many of them do not even know what sexual ejaculation or orgasms are. And naturally, if a young married woman from a culture of glorified ignorance has no idea about sex on her wedding night, it is only natural that, after having intimacy, she won't know that she has to take a ritual bath before praying again.

Moreover, some Muslim girls are shunning Islamic relationships altogether in favor of the “less judgmental” non-Muslim culture of male-female interaction. “I would rather deal with non-Muslim guys,” a teenage girl told me. “At least with them, I won't feel judged for what I think or feel.”

♥ There Is No “The Talk”

“Did you have ‘the talk’ with your teenagers yet?” is a common question non-Muslim parents ask in the West in reference to sitting down and having a serious conversation with young adult children about sex, birth control, and male-female relationships. The implication is that talking to our children about sexual intimacy is a “one shot deal.” Here, we muster up the courage to



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finally sit our children down to hear us pour our hearts out about anything and everything related to sex, and then afterwards we sigh relief that it's all over so we can go back to sleep—literally and figuratively.

However, true sex education does not work like this. And incidentally, the Western culture of “the talk” isn't much different from the culture of glorified ignorance and false modesty. Both assume sex to be a shameful topic to be avoided if possible; thus, both potentially result in sexual irresponsibility and dangerous ignorance in young adults.

So no, there is no “the talk.” Like any part of life, the topic of sex must be addressed on multiple occasions and in many different discussions. It's almost never a “one shot deal.”

♥ Sex Is a Part of Life

If we are to get beyond the taboos we've imposed on ourselves and our children regarding the topic of sex, we must accept and embrace the reality that sex is a natural part of life. We can achieve this by first acknowledging our own psychological and



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cultural barriers on the subject, whether we are indigenous Westerners who have accepted Islam or adults from predominately-Muslim countries who have been practicing Islam for generations.

♥ Steps to Confronting the Taboo

As with any challenge in life, the first step to overcoming our internal hurdles regarding the topic of sex is to supplicate to the Creator and ask His assistance. Many of us have never considered mentioning the topic of sex to Allah Himself, but this is part of the problem. If we cannot raise our hands to the Creator and ask His help in understanding this part of His creation, how do we imagine we will be able to help ourselves?

As the female Companion Umm Sulaym said, Allah is not shy of the truth.

So let's ask His help in understanding this truth and in embracing the proper way to overcome our false modesty.

After supplicating to Allah for help, we should seek both worldly and religious knowledge on the topic. Fortunately, in both



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secular and authentic religious contexts, there are many books, articles, and lectures on the topic. As we learn, we can share the information with our children and discuss what we are learning.

Ask questions, questions, and more questions. In overcoming this taboo, we cannot be shy to ask questions when necessary, and we cannot be shy to ask our children questions regarding what they already know and think about the subject, especially given that the topic of sex is not at all taboo in many teenage circles—in the West and in predominately Muslim countries.

Admit your shortcomings. While it's not okay to glorify ignorance about sex, it is okay to not know everything. So when you or your children stumble upon something you are not familiar with, then go to trustworthy sources to find the answers.

And finally, don't let go of your natural *hayaa'*. Having a sense of shame is necessary, as *hayaa'* is part of our faith. With sex, we have *hayaa'* by discussing things in a proper context and decent manner so that both we and our children continue to have healthy shyness and discretion in our personal and religious lives. As with everything in Islam, maintaining a balance is most



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important. We do not avoid the topic of sex altogether, and we do not indulge in it unnecessarily; Islamic *hayaa'* is somewhere in between.

In this way, we won't feel unnecessary shame or false modesty when someone suggests, "Let's talk about sex."





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SEX AND OUR MUSLIM YOUTH

By Dr. Ahmed Adam***

♥ Introduction



The topic of sex has universal appeal. Sex is portrayed daily in various forms-directly or indirectly-in newspapers, magazines, cinemas, and in conversations between people. The topic of sex conjures images of sexuality, promiscuity, lewdness, adultery, fornication, pornography, rape, teenage pregnancies, pedophilia, gays,



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sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives, abortions, and HIV/AIDS.

Yet somehow, despite the fact that "everyone" is influenced by this topic, it seems that most parents find this topic somewhat "delicate" to discuss with their children. Children of today seem to be maturing at a faster rate than a generation ago and often ask intelligent questions of their parents. Some parents do their level best to satisfy their children's natural curiosity. Other parents simply don't know how to handle their fast-growing kids and often assume that the less said about the subject of sex, the better.

In some homes the word "sex" is taboo, and children are often reprimanded for asking innocent questions. Parents assume that children will grow up and "they will learn," or that the school or friends are "responsible" for sharing this knowledge. The reality is that parents who have this view are overlooking a major and significant source of correct information regarding this topic-themselves! Our children have the right to be given an unbiased view of sex, based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).



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Western media is very powerful, and often the main driver is money rather than values based on sound moral principles and with their roots in religion. This essay deals with this topic in an objective manner to throw some light on this issue and thereby, perhaps, give some confused teenagers a clearer perspective of the choices that they can make. I am not a moralist or a *mawlana*. I do not intend to be judgmental of any individual, group, or society, but simply give my opinion on this topic from an Islamic point of view. Any errors are my own and I seek the forgiveness of Allah Most High for any errors contained in this article.

♥ Sex Education

Studies have shown that the average teenager and preteen receive their sex education from the following sources in order of priority:

- 1- Friends, who may then share pornographic magazines, books, and Internet



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2- TV and movies, which then lead to magazines and newspapers, or school (video or discussions of video), parents (through discussion of TV and movies)

Parents fail to realize that everyone is teaching their children about sex except them. Everyone is telling your children about sex, so how sure are you that this information is based on the guidelines laid down in Islam?

Sex is a fashionable industry that changes like the flavor of the month. Sex is a topic that advertisers and marketers use very effectively to sell their products. Unfortunately, the sources of information available to the preteen are often biased. Illusions are created that everyone is having sex ... in these modern times, anything goes ... you only live once, so make the most of it, and it is "cool" to chew a particular brand of chewing gum or smoke a particular brand of cigarette because that will make you rich and successful and ensure that you can attract the perfect partner. In fact, the reality is far removed from the illusion that is fed to the senses of our unsuspecting youth.



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With aggressive and sustained marketing, society comes to accept abnormal activities as normal. Ten years ago, what was considered abnormal, unthinkable, abhorrent, immoral, and shameful, is today considered fashionable, normal, and modern.

A typical example is that after watching a few episodes of any prime-time soap opera on TV, one gets the impression that adultery is acceptable and normal; premarital sex fashionable, and that deceit, trickery, lying, and manipulation are essential to get your man or woman, no matter what the cost or the hurt that others suffer in the process. Furthermore, the printed and visual media create the impression that marriage is old fashioned, live-in relationships and cohabitation are in vogue, and being gay is fashionable.

Homosexuality, bestiality, and escort clubs (prostitution) are all normal. We have reached a stage (through effective marketing) where certain individuals in society justify everything by their right to freedom of expression. If this is really freedom, then why do we see so many examples of the following scenarios:



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1- Young adults are being infected with the HIV virus at an alarming rate. South Africa has one of the fastest growing number of infected people in the world; HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions in this country. The age group that is mainly targeted is teenagers and young adults.

2- A devout mother, loyal to her husband, suddenly develops a sexually transmitted disease (such as syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, or even HIV/AIDS); how did this happen? STDs have reached epidemic proportions in America, where 40 million people are infected with some form of STD.

3- Teenage pregnancy is on the increase; girls as young as 11 are getting pregnant-a child is pregnant with a child. Many teenagers are having abortions, which leads to emotional, physical, and mental side effects.

4- Girls as young as 10-12 are having unprotected sex, with devastating consequences. When questioned, these young children say, "No one told me that it is wrong."



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5- Wonderful homes break up and end in divorce because the husband (or wife) was having an adulterous relationship; the main victims in this scenario are the children.

6- Females as young as 2 and as old as 80 are being raped.

7- Homosexuality is on the increase; acts of sodomy that were once considered an abomination against humanity, are now considered normal to the extent that gay marriages are being allowed in some parts of the world.

8- More and more relationships end up in hurt, depression, unhappiness, conflict, and regret.

The above examples show that the issue of sexual liberation has in fact enslaved the very people that it attempts to free. The sexual liberators are being enslaved in the chains of disease, depression, divorce, dissatisfaction, double standards, deceit, and discontent. Individuals, organizations, and governments are actively searching for solutions to halt this tide of immorality and its associated truckload of problems.



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Recent research has shown that two-thirds of the schools in America are now promoting the idea of "no sex before marriage" and that "safe sex" is not the use of condoms, but safe sex is "no sex before marriage," and only one sex partner for life (no adultery). Furthermore, many states in the US are promoting the idea of having pride in remaining a virgin until marriage, and many students are signing certificates vowing their commitment to this new "fashion" of abstinence.

How long will this last? Will we once again undergo a new sexual revolution? The answer to this dilemma and to all dilemmas facing any society where the fabric of society is under threat from immorality, alcoholism, drugs, gambling, crime, dishonesty, and materialism can be found in the Qur'an, which has been sent for all humanity. Its principles have a universal application for all times. It was the task of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) to give a practical implementation of the universal message of the Qur'an so that anyone who follows the perfect example of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) will be on the straight path.



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♥ The Islamic View of These Problems

Adultery

Adultery means to have sex with a person who is not your legally married partner; there are two types of adultery:

- 1- A married person who has sex with an unmarried person
- 2- A married person who has sex with another married person

Would you like adultery for your mother, wife, sister, or daughter? If not, then why perpetuate it or condone it? There are several verses in the Qur'an and many authentic hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), which give clear guidance on the choices that we can make.

[Say: the things that my Lord hath indeed forbidden are: shameful deeds, whether open or secret;...] (Al-A`raf 7:33)

[Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).] (Al-Israa' 17:32)



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- 1- Marriage is a sacred relationship between a husband and wife. When either spouse has a sexual relationship outside this relationship, this is usually done secretly; thus there is breakdown of trust in the relationship.
- 2- The guilty party may contract a sexually transmitted disease, which can then be transmitted to the innocent victim.
- 3- The victim is usually the female. She has two options, either stay and ignore what the father of her children is doing, or ask for a divorce. If the woman does not have a source of income, she either has to return to her parents and thus be a burden on them, or eke out a living and thus raise her children in poverty.
- 4- Children are the innocent victims in divorce. They bear the brunt of the constant fights between their parents and grow up with emotional and psychological scars.

Fornication

Fornication (*zina*) means to have sex with anyone while not yet married; there are two types of fornication:



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- 1- An unmarried person who has sex with another unmarried person
- 2- An unmarried person who has sex with a married person; in this case, it is fornication for the unmarried person but adultery for the married person

[Those who invoke not, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life as God has made sacred, except for just cause, nor commit fornication; and any that does this (not only) meets punishment (but) the Penalty on the Day of Judgment will be doubled to him, and he will dwell therein in ignominy.] (Al-Furqan 25:68-69)

In this verse, the sin of fornication is given its seriousness by being ranked as follows:

- The first major sin is associating partners with Allah Most High
- The second major sin is murder
- The third major sin is fornication



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The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "When a man commits fornication, faith departs from him and there is something like a canvas roof over his head; and when he quits that action, faith returns to him" (Abu Dawud #4673).

The Prophet said, "The one who commits illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse, and a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft, and a drinker of alcoholic drink is not a believer at the time of drinking. Yet, (the gate of) repentance is open thereafter" (Al-Bukhari 8, 801).

Furthermore, the punishment is described in the following verse: [The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication- flog each of them with a hundred stripes: let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day] (An-Nur 24:2).

Furthermore, if the girl becomes pregnant as a consequence of this premarital or extramarital act, then the child is not considered a legal heir according to the following hadith:



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The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "If a man commits fornication with a free woman or a slave woman, the child is the product of fornication, and neither does he inherit nor may anyone inherit from him" (At-Tirmidhi #3054).

Marriage

Marriage is the public proclamation that gives legal, physical, and spiritual license to have sex with your partner.

[Let those who find not the wherewithal for marriage keep themselves chaste until Allah gives them means out of His Grace.] (An-Nur 24:33)

[For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's Praise-for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and a great reward.] (Al-Ahzab 33:35)



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Muslim males and females are enjoined to marry. There are various guidelines pertaining to selecting a suitable partner in life. This choice cannot be left to chance.

However, if anyone does not have the means to marry, this dilemma does not entitle anyone to fornicate; rather he or she is enjoined to remain chaste and to patiently persevere and seek help from Allah Most High. To guard your chastity is a test from Allah Most High and requires a lot of discipline and willpower.

However, those individuals who succeed in avoiding fornication and adultery, [for them has Allah Most High prepared forgiveness and a great reward.] Furthermore, according to the following verses, there are clear instructions for those people who commit fornication and then decide to marry:

[Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an unbeliever: nor let any but such a man or an unbeliever marry such a woman: to the believers such a thing is forbidden.] (An-Nur 24:3)



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[(Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, when you give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues.] (Al-Ma'idah 5:5)

These verses emphasize the need and pursuit of sexual purity both before marriage and within marriage, and give guidelines as to the selection of a partner. Sex counselors and psychologists now confirm the wisdom behind these verses.

A person who has multiple partners is always comparing the spouse's performance to that of other partners. If an "experienced" boy marries a virgin wife, he may be unhappy with her inexperience and may expect (and sometimes demand) more. This can lead to a very fragile relationship, which is bound to flounder. Unfortunately, some men have a double standard wherein they feel free to have sex with multiple partners before marriage, but insist that their wife must be a virgin.



Sex and Hygiene

Islam places a very high emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness. This requirement, together with sexual purity both before marriage and during marriage, tremendously minimizes the risks of diseases associated with the sexual organs. The need and emphasis on cleanliness is highlighted in the following:

[O ye who believe! when ye prepare for prayer wash your faces and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; rub your heads (with water); and (wash) your feet to the ankles.

If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body.] (Al-Ma'idah 5:6)

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "When anyone sits between the four parts of her body and exerts himself (has intercourse), bathing becomes obligatory (for both)." (Muslim)

Sa'id ibn Al-Musayab (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him) said to 'A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), "I would like to ask you



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something, but I am embarrassed." She said, "Ask and don't be shy, for I am your mother." He asked about a man who had intercourse but did not ejaculate. She said, on the authority of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), **"If the two circumcised parts encountered each other, ghusl is obligatory"** (Ahmad and Malik).

Prostitution

Prostitution is forbidden in Islam as indicated in the following hadith:

A slave girl of some Ansari came and said, "My master forces me to commit fornication." Thereupon, the following verse was revealed: [But force not your maids to prostitution (when they desire chastity)] (Abu Dawud #2304).

It is a very sad reflection on our society that some people are forced into prostitution due to circumstances that may be beyond their control. The most wicked and severe form of prostitution is that of child prostitution, enforced either by their parents (very rarely, but most abhorrently), caregivers, or



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swindlers. Furthermore, studies have shown that there is a very high correlation between prostitution and drugs.

Drug dealers usually prey on unsuspecting teenagers at shopping malls, cinemas, and schools, by offering them free drugs. The unsuspecting teenagers become addicted and involuntarily become "customers for life" to these drug dealers. The teenagers then resort to begging, stealing, and prostituting to service this habit.

Teenagers should be on the alert for pimps and drug dealers- nothing in life comes for free, there is always a catch. Be alert. Furthermore, be very alert to the dangers presented by pedophiles who derive a perverted sense of pleasure in abusing young children.

♥ Willpower and Discipline

Adultery and fornication do not happen automatically. The mind plays an important role in the whole scenario. Everyone is constantly bombarded with visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli that are processed in the mind.



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These messages can either be controlled or uncontrolled. If teenagers have low self-esteem and want to be accepted, they will give in to temptation. On the other hand, teenagers who are firm in their faith in Allah Most High and who have positive self-esteem, use their willpower to control temptation and channel it into another form of energy.

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Allah Most High has written for the son of Adam his inevitable share of adultery, whether he is aware of it or not: The adultery of the eye is looking (at something which is sinful to look at), and the adultery of the tongue is to utter (what it is unlawful to utter), and the inner-self wishes and longs for (adultery) and the private parts turn that into reality or refrain from submitting to the temptation" (Al-Bukhari 8, 609).

♥ Prevalence of Illegal Sex

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "From among the portents of the hour is that (open) illegal sexual intercourse will prevail, and men will decrease in number while women will increase" (Al-Bukhari 8, 800A).



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This hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) very accurately describes our current state of affairs. San Francisco and Sydney are famous for their "gay liberation" celebrations. Nudist colonies, escort agencies, pornography, teenage pregnancies, and adultery are so common that people seem to be fighting a losing battle against this tidal wave of immorality and have come to accept all of these activities as the "modern generation."

Furthermore, with each generation, the level and availability of lewdness is increasing; for example, pornography is available in our homes on TV and the Internet, thus affecting the mindset of our children from an early age. Homosexuality is gaining support throughout many parts of the world. Some advocates of the gay movement are claiming that they are born gay. This is a ruse to cover their shameful behavior. Homosexuality is a lifestyle choice. Allah Most High created everything in pairs, male and female. Anyone who goes against this plan will be answerable to Allah Most High.

The above verses from the Qur'an and various hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) clearly



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indicate that both fornication and adultery are forbidden in Islam; furthermore, the long-term harm of these acts far outweigh and short-term momentary gratification.

In simple terms, the Islamic requirement is as follows:

- 1- Boys and girls should not have sex before they are married
- 2- Sex is only permissible between legally married partners
- 3- Within the arena of the marriage contract, sex is a sacred, private, and personal act between the married couple only; this means that the husband and wife should guard their "bedroom secrets" from all prying ears and eyes.
- 4- Neither of the partners is allowed to have sex with anyone else. This means that neither the husband nor the wife can indulge in the un-Islamic practices of wife swapping parties, visiting prostitutes, or having sex with another married or single person.



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5- If the husband is legally married to more than one wife (up to a maximum of four) then he is legally allowed to have sex with all four wives provided that he treats all of them equally.

6- When in doubt about anything, use the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to give clarity on any matter.

♥ Role of Parents

Our children are faced daily with images from TV, movies, videos, Internet, newspapers, magazines, books, and friends about the "sexual revolution." Their young minds are being brainwashed with ideas that morals, modesty, and values are old-fashioned. If we do not tell our children about the facts of life and what is acceptable moral behavior from a cultural, and, more importantly, from an Islamic viewpoint, then we should share the blame with our children if they become ensnared in the vices of sex, drugs, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, alcohol, and gambling. The methodology should be as follows:



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♥ Advice to a Preteen Daughter

Your body is now undergoing various changes that will prepare you to be a woman. With these changes comes the responsibility that you will one day be a mother. Your body will undergo various changes in the size of your breasts, face, height, weight, as well as the onset of a flow of menstrual blood on a regular basis every month-this is nothing to be scared of, it is Allah Most High's miracle, where your womb is made ready every month to receive an egg for fertilization.

These changes are coming much earlier in this generation compared to a few decades ago. Children are maturing much faster than we can ever imagine. In previous generations, young girls started menstruating from the age of 13 years; today, girls as young as 9 years are beginning to menstruate. This means that if you have sex at this age, you can become pregnant. If you become pregnant at this age, your life will be shattered and the whole course of your life will be changed. Your dreams, goals, and wishes to pursue a career may have to be postponed or abandoned forever.



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You must be happy with your own body. Your body will undergo various hormonal changes, which will lead to emotional changes and mood fluctuations as well as pimples. This is a time for conflict with everyone, and parents have to restrain themselves and discuss issues with love and understanding. The main word of caution for you is to avoid peer pressure from your friends, who will encourage you to start experimenting with kissing and sex.

Some teenagers can make very hurtful remarks and may make you feel very isolated if you do not participate. Don't listen to them. You must have enough confidence in yourself that you are following the commands laid down by Allah Most High and you should simply say "No, I am not interested." It will be a decision that you will never regret. Particularly avoid the older boys and men.

They will shower you with gifts, flowers, and false proclamations of love, but they are simply throwing out a net to get you into bed so that you lose your virginity. They will then dump you and go to the next unsuspecting girl. You will have lost various personal things in the process:



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You will have lost your virginity.

You will have contravened the Qur'anic injunction not to commit fornication (*zina*).

You may well have gained an unwanted pregnancy (many girls still have the mistaken myth that they cannot fall pregnant after their first sexual encounter.)

You may have gained a sexually transmitted disease (including HIV/AIDS).

There are no cures for some sexual diseases: herpes and genital warts, for example. Some diseases, if not properly treated, can lead to infertility and you will not be able to have children. Or they lead to an increased incidence of cancer of the cervix (entrance to the womb).

♥ Advice to a Preteen Son

Your body is undergoing various changes that will prepare you to enter adulthood so that one day you can be a father. You will notice changes in your voice; you may develop acne and hair on



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various parts of your body. Nocturnal emission is common at this age, as well as mood swings. Your natural body odors will increase, so it is important for you to bathe regularly and pay special attention to personal hygiene.

Your body will be growing rapidly and you will need to eat a lot, exercise a lot, and sleep a lot to allow your body to gain maximum physical benefits.

You will be encouraged or ridiculed by some of your friends to have sex with a girl. You should be confident in your abilities as a freethinking individual to make your own choices based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

You should treat all girls and women with respect, kindness, and courtesy-not as a commodity that can be used, abused, and thrown aside. You will see advertisements on TV and in newspapers and magazines that in order to avoid HIV/AIDS, you should use a condom. Remember that this is not what Islam teaches us. Islam says safe sex is "no sex before marriage." Indulge in all activities that will develop your mind, body, and



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spirit within the framework of Islam. These are wonderful years that you are going through, free of responsibility (except the homework!). Try to be the best "you" you can be.

♥ Conclusion

Allah Most High has given mankind free will. We all have to make choices in life. However, life offers us a whole banquet of choices and delicacies that sometimes lead to a state of utter confusion or paralysis. What is the right decision?

Whom should I please?

What is fashionable?

Will my decision open me to ridicule?

An undecided person is always a victim of circumstance, a pawn in the hands of the fashion trendsetters. The ones at peace are those individuals who use the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the compass to set the right course and to differentiate right from wrong.



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There is much good in this wonderful world; however, there are many temptations. Temptations are present as a test for all of us. Ultimately, we are the decision-makers. We can only make informed decisions based on knowledge. Many governments are now firmly advocating the policies of virginity, no sex before marriage, no adultery, and so on, in a desperate attempt to rekindle the value systems of prior generations.

The beauty of Islam is that the instructions and guidelines contained in the Qur'an are valid forever and are immune to the vicissitudes of the latest trend. Allah Most High created us. It therefore follows that He knows what is best for us. I do hope that this brief discussion has thrown some light on this very vast topic. I also hope that the current generation of teens and preteens who are often faced with difficult choices will have a clearer foundation on which to base their decisions.

Finally, a new generation of preteens is developing. It is our collective responsibility, as a community and a nation, to give clear guidelines to our youth. Our youth is our future and our destiny. May Allah Most High, Most Gracious, worthy of all praise,



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in His infinite wisdom and mercy, guide us, and our youth to a path that is straight.





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PRACTICAL CASES





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I FEEL DIRTY FOR HAVING THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM



Q. Assalam Alaikum dear counselors, I am a born Muslimah from a very conservative Muslim family. Alhamdulillah I have always been observant and good in my faith. I considered myself pure.

But I had encountered myself in a situation; I think I fell in love with a man, a man who is not ready to marry me. Yet he has introduced me to the pleasures shared



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between a man and his wife. I haven't committed zina (fornication) yet (Alhamdulillah) but we have committed sins. That much I know.

It was my first time. He is also a Muslim but he is vastly experienced sexually. I have come to a point where I think I am doomed. I know what I am doing is wrong and haram (prohibited by Islam). Yet I see myself going to him from time to time. Is there any hope for me? Can I ever start again a life where I won't feel this dirty?

♥ **Counselor Mohamed Wadeed Gouda**

A. Dear Sister,

Of course there is a way out, yet it requires such a hard work to be seen, and a full readiness from your side to be attained.

I am fully aware of how you feel about yourself, but let me tell you this **“We are all humans, and we all make mistakes”**; however, one of the gravest mistakes humans do is **manipulating this phrase** itself.



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Some humans – regardless what religion they belong to- are so skillful at using this phrase to do whatever it takes to suck pleasure in this universe; moreover, they are the ones who feel little to no guilt at all –cold hearted attitude- not only because they manipulate the mentioned phrase, but because they feel bad to feel good...

God would forgive when you show the sincere positive grief, because psychologically there is a negative feeling of dirt and a positive one.

♥ When Feeling Dirty is Positive

The negative feeling is the feeling that is used as a defense mechanism to deactivate the change.

Usually there is something in you that is not happy with your sins, so you feel bad about it, and then you feel good, content, and satisfied about feeling bad about it. As if this is all what you need to do. The more you feel dirty, the more you feel good....



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Considering the above, you do the sin knowing that all what it takes is to feel dirty, and overtime, some people enjoy feeling dirty because it liberates them from guilt..

So you have to be aware of how things work psychologically to avoid being fooled.

The positive side of feeling dirty, on the other hand, is the feeling that gives you the power needed to change ...

♥ Desire isn't Love

Let me loudly disagree with using the word 'love' in this conversation because love has nothing to do with what has happened. We can call it desire, animalistic need may be- which we all have by the way. I am saying this because I feel sorry for this pretty word that have been abused, misused, and hijacked.

When you violate all ethical rules, and betray your family members by going to him – I am not sure if he is married, so you guys betray his wife or kids as well or not!!- However, when this happens from time to time, you have to know that **love was not in the picture at all.**



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My role as a counselor is to prevent you from any illusion that may take place, since **awareness is the first step in any process of change.**

The word love has a lot to do with purity, honesty, and mutual goodness. So, I am wondering where the word love fits in such a relation if he was not ready to marry you.

I am stating the above to mirror the truth in your face may be it will help you. Mirror does not tell you what to do, yet, it projects the truth that you are living in unconsciously; in another word, it takes you from the denial to the awareness and it is up to you to take the necessary action/s.

♥ Price of Repentance is Simple

Finally, I want to assure you that **God is awaiting your repentance every day & every night.** But you need to embrace his mercy before your heart is blocked and you have no more control over it.

You should always remember the narration of this man who had killed a hundred souls, and he had asked a scholar if there is any



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way out? Would God accept my repentance!! The answer was, yes... but you need to leave your city and to go to a new one.

This condition was very symbolic, since it shows to all sinners that **no matter how bad you were, there is always a chance if you are wholly ready to pay the price**, and the price is so simple...

Just depart from anything that reminds you of your past, because if you won't, you will keep swinging back and forth, and feeling dirty won't help at this point...





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LIVING WITH GUILT AFTER HAVING PREMARITAL SEX

Q. I've read numerous situations of others and have understood that the door of repentance is always opened. My problem is that I was together with a guy for nearly 6 years. However, things





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started to go wrong approximately 3 years ago. He initiated a kiss and things got out of hand subsequently. I tried not to commit those sinful acts each time we meet, but somehow, I found myself unable to resist the temptation.

Once, we even engaged in premarital sex. Since then, I've been disgusted with myself and with our relationship and have been living with guilt each day. Finally, I decided to don the head scarf as a way of repentance which, I hope, will lead me to the right way without temptations and will also prevent him from touching me.

I don't blame him for all the acts and for that premarital intercourse, which happened only once, as it takes two hands to clap. I know it is a big sin and I've discussed with him many times how we should stop all these nonsense and be on the straight path of Islam. He agreed and promised not to kiss or touch me again. But unfortunately almost every time we met, he broke his promise and when I brought the topic up, he said he couldn't help it.

After nearly 2 years believing that our relationship will end in marriage and that both of us can have a clean relationship, I gave up. I ended our relationship, because I cannot continue since he



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doesn't seem as keen to make this relationship work out without committing any sin as me. Each time, he broke his promise and after putting on the hijab, I even felt worst committing those sins. I felt like I am ridiculing Allah, even though, I had no intention doing so. I let him know of my feelings and guilt, but I'm not sure if he took my words seriously.

My question is: is it right for me to end the relationship? I read somewhere on the website saying "let one guilty of fornication marry another similarly guilty." I love him and I don't want to be the cause of his sin, but it doesn't seem to be the same for him. I am not ready for marriage as I still study at school, but I also can't continue with this relationship either if we can't stop ourselves from committing those sinful acts. I've been trying to read on your website about ways to repent, but now I've lost all my hope that I will be able to get married. I feel dirty and I don't feel worthy enough for anyone after such great sins I've committed. I have shamed my family, especially my parents. They know nothing about this, always seeing me as their obedient daughter. This adds to my guilt, because not only I committed such great sins, but I was playing with their trust.



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My mom used to tell me that each time we sin in this world, my great-great grandfather will suffer in the other world. Is this true? I can't erase the thought that I've caused him great suffer. I am trying very hard to repent from all my sins. Please help! I need to know how I can erase all these guilt. I am troubled by this and I really want to live a life which is blessed by Allah (swt). Please, do help. Thank you.

♥ **Counselor Hwaa Irfan**

A. As-salamu `alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh my dear daughter,

What can I say? As you said, it takes two hands to clap, and as much as the boy whom you thought you were going to marry initiated the physical aspects of the relationship, it could not happen without your consent-physically, emotionally, or psychologically.

Islam is not old-fashioned, unreasonable, or incompatible as many would deem it to be. From the laws of nature, we can learn



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much about ourselves as we truly are and not as the whispers of self-interested man tell us to believe. Islam says quite clearly:

1. "The fornication of the eyes is to look with lust; the fornication of the tongue is to speak lustful things; the fornication of the hands is to touch with lust; the fornication of the feet is to walk towards lust; the fornication of the heart is to desire evil."(Muslim)
2. "Whenever a man is alone with a woman the Devil makes a third." (Al-Tirmidhi 3118)

But this is not just the word of your parent's religion — Islam — but the word of a religion rooted in the laws of nature.

Within our bodies, we have a hormone called oxytocin, which is a neurotransmitter to the brain.

Women oxytocin level increases:

- When the cervix and vagina are distended during labor
- To facilitate birthing and breastfeeding
- During orgasms
- When relationships are formed



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In your case, oxytocin levels in the brain rise as a result of sexual arousal, the formation of trust and the reduction of fear.

As children, we are calmed by the touch of a parent. When we are ill or upset we are calmed by the touch (physical-nonphysical) of someone who cares. When we are touched, oxytocin level increases.

So with this "chicken or the egg" scenario, when do you know if it is your hormones telling you what to do or if you are in control of the situation? When is your level of trust justified? If the *nafs* fulfills its role in our self-development, then we may very well be not the wiser one. Why you feel guilty and ashamed is most probably because you went out of control.

Feeling unable or unwilling to control yourself, you allowed yourself to believe his "talk" of marriage. This boy did not make one mistake from which he learned and sought to go through the procedures of marrying you. This boy's oxytocin levels were out of control. Do you think Islam is backward about male-female relationships? The Big Lie is that we believe that we can do



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anything we want whenever we want and however we want without making a sacrifice.

You spent time with this boy alone when you should not have, and you are not ready for marriage, so how much you believed that you were going to get married can only be determined by you.

{ "We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things?" } (Fusillat 4:53)

I would sincerely suggest that fasting would be most helpful right now, especially if you are in a position to slow down your activities and increase *du`aa'* and *dhikr*. You will be surprised to find how much better you can feel and how cleansed and rejuvenated.



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WRITERS BIO

- ♥ **Umm Zakiyyah** is the internationally acclaimed author of the *If I Should Speak* trilogy and the novels *Realities of Submission* and *Hearts We Lost*. To learn more about the author, visit ummzakiyyah.com or subscribe to her [YouTube channel](#).
- ♥ **Raudah Mohd Yunus**, Freelance Writer- Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
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- ♥ **Dr. Maryam Bachmeier** is a doctor of Clinical Psychology and a licensed Clinical Psychologist in both California and Guam, providing clinical services to individuals within the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, as well as consultation to the department. Dr. Bachmeier is also a published author who has been working in the mental health field for over 13 years.
- ♥ **Aliah Azmeh**, MSW is a licensed clinical social worker who practices in Detroit, Michigan. Aliah graduated with a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan in 2007 and has experience working in the United States and overseas. Aliah currently works as a clinical social worker and provides individual, family, and marital counseling at Muslim Family Services in Detroit, MI.



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- ♥ **Mohamed Wadeed Gouda:** As former director of the Islamic School of Rhode Island, U.S. Mohamed Wadeed Gouda obtained his Masters in Mental Health Counseling and Psychotherapy from Rhode Island College, U.S. He obtained his Masters in Islamic Philosophy from Cairo University, Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies from Cairo University. He is an associate member of the American Counseling Association, and the American Psychological Association.
- ♥ **Hwaa Irfan** Undertook training and studies in cross-cultural and trans-cultural practices in holistic medicine, counseling and psycho-spiritual counseling. Whilst training social workers, legal paramedics, counselors, psychiatric medical professionals and Finally took a post-graduate in becoming a Teacher's and Trainer's Trainer as the only methods to recognize a non-Western approach formally.



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Have studied at the Jafari School Islamic Fiqh and taught at Summer Schools for 9 -15 year old young Muslims. As an extension of my formal work, a loose network was developed in the South London community for Muslims in desperate situations and need of support involving spouses, places of education and health and social service facilities. Have run workshops and invigilate seminars on legal issues pertaining to Muslim refugees.

- ♥ **Selma Cook** is a contributing writer to OnIslam.net. She has written a number of books including: Buried Treasure (An Islamic novel for teenagers), The Light of Submission (Islamic Poetry). She has also edited and revised many Islamic books.
- ♥ **Amina Cisse Muhammad** is the founder of Keys to Power Editorial Services and Success Coaching. Deeply committed to empowering individuals of all ages to reach their full potential in life, Amina is a writer and facilitator for workshops on personal development and growth. You may contact her at (404) 447-5629 in the Atlanta, GA (USA) area for more information on the services provided by Keys to Power. She invites you to write to her at keystopower@juno.com to let



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her know of any miracles that occur in your life as a result of your sharing a bit more love out in the world.

