Islamic Guidelines for Gender Interactions (part 2 of 2)

Description: The lesson focuses on setting boundaries between men and women as defined by Allah to protect us and to keep our hearts and thoughts pure.

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Category: Lessons >Social Interaction

Objectives:

·   To learn about the three types of forbidden *ikhtilaat* in Islam.

·   To learn four guidelines to be observed when interacting with the opposite gender.

Arabic Terms:

·   *Ikhtilaat* - physical presence of men and women at one place.

·   *Khalwah* - a man being alone with a non-*mahram* woman.

·   *Mahram* - a person, man or woman related to a particular individual by blood, marriage or breastfeeding. One he or she is not permitted to marry, such as the father, nephew, uncle, etc

How do people slip into adultery? Why do office romances take place? How do married men get romantically involved with another woman? The simple answer is that it is a slow process of boundary-less decisions. It is a gradual thing. Imagine a little wall all around you, with a gate. Your heart lives inside the wall and Allah has told you how to control the gate. Bad things happen when you either do not know what Allah has told you or are careless about what goes in and what goes out of that gate.

There are three forms of *ikhtilaat* or intermixing that are forbidden:

First, the touch is a form of non-verbal communication. Islam frowns upon any form of physical contact or touching between men and non-*mahram* women. The Prophet, may Allah praise him, said: **"I do not shake hands with women."** (Muwatta, Sunan Tirmidhi,

Nasai, Ibn Majah)

He also said: **"If one of you were to be stabbed in the head with a needle of iron, it would be better for him than touching a woman who is not permissible for him."** (at-Tabarani) This would include situations where men and women are close enough to lead to physical contact.

Now, there might be an unavoidable situation or demands of a profession like a nurse touching a male patient or crowding during Hajj. Get clarity on them by referring to a knowledgeable scholar of Islam. The general rule is clear and has been explained.

Second, being alone with a non-*mahram* woman. It's known as *khalwah*. The Prophet of Islam said, **"Never is a man alone with a woman except that Satan is the third party with them."**

Khalwah takes place when one or more men are alone with a single non-*mahram* woman in a place where no one can see them. If there are two women and a man, this is not *khalwah*. Whether something untoward happens or not is not the point, it is still a sin. Seclusion of this type is still a sin no matter what happens as a result. It still corrodes and is bad for one's intention.

For example, don't be in the office alone with a man. Either leave or ask another female co-worker to stay.

Third, a man being with a non-*mahram* woman in one place without *khalwah*, but social controls and restrictions are relaxed and inhibitions are dampened. The same can be said for any repeated acquaintance between men and women. Repeated meetings break down barriers and allow opportunities for a relationship to develop.

Two points must be understood here:

1.   There are situations and places we control and there are some we don't. We might be excused for what lies outside of our control, and we should ask Allah for His forgiveness. At the same time we are responsible for the places we control.

2.   How should we act in places we do not control? What are the rules of behavior for a Muslim woman when she meets a man? How should Muslim men and women set boundaries with the opposite gender? Boundaries by virtue of their purpose indicate a clear line of separation. With this in mind, what is the clear line of separation in our behavior with colleagues or fellow students of the opposite gender? There are four guidelines:

1. Eye Contact

Lower the gaze, limit eye contact, and obviously do not exchange admiring glances. Allah tells us in the Quran,

> **"Tell the believing men that they should lower their gazes and guard their chastity. This is purer for them. Allah is informed of what they do (He knows the inclinations of the heart and the**

secretive glances that men cast).   And tell the believing women that they should lower their gazes and preserve their chastity." (Quran 24:30-31)

2. Dress

Both men and women should maintain the Islamic dress code.[1]

"...they (women) must not expose (anything that reveals) their beauty, except what becomes apparent of it (the outer garment which obviously cannot be concealed when a woman leaves her home). And they should wear their scarves over their bosoms (to cover their heads and breasts)..." (Quran 24:31)

3. Body Language

Be dignified in your body language. Watch your movement, gestures, and postures. Allah says in the Quran,

"...they (women) should not strike their feet on the ground to reveal the beauties (jewellery) that they conceal (they should walk in a manner that does not cause their jewellery to jingle and attract attention)..." (Quran 24:31)

4. Tone of Voice

Use a serious tone of voice and expression. Like a spoon of sugar can encourage a child to take bad tasting medicine, so can sweet words seduce a person from the opposite gender. You do not have to be rude, but speak in a "business like" tone. Your speech should be direct and to the point so that no desire is aroused in the person. Allah says in the Quran,

"...do not speak in lowered tones (with a sweet voice) lest he in whose heart is a disease of lust should be moved with desire. And speak in a befitting manner." (Quran 33:32)

In practical terms: don't flirt, make crude jokes, touch, giggle, use suggestive body-language and avoid having a relaxed, informal, social conversation.

Endnotes:

[1] For more information on this, please see: (http://www.newmuslims.com/lessons/135/) [3 parts]

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