

Pornography Use Causes Dependency, Misery and Harm to Humanity

Introduction: Pornography Use is a Consequence of Western Hedonism

Pornography is widespread to the point that it has become a norm wherever Western civilization has influence. The use of pornography is indeed an outcome of the dominant civilization today, the Western civilization. Hedonism is the Western view regarding the satisfaction of instinctive desires, including the sexual desire, which is a manifestation of the species' instinct. The concept of hedonism is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. The hedonistic view is that desires must not be suppressed or regulated in any manner whatsoever, leading man to wherever his desires lead him. Hedonism is a reaction to the era of ruling by the Church, which regarded the sexual desire as being carnal and the sexual act as an animalistic. The Church regarded abstinence and celibacy as virtuous. Such non-satiation of the instinct led to misery in society, including sexual frustration. However, in reaction to suppression, abstinence and denial, hedonism went to another extreme. It unleashed the instincts to excess, which in turn led to other forms of harms, miseries and afflictions.

In the case of pornography users, hedonism leads to extensive use of pornography, searching for more extreme forms, being triggered sexually constantly and craving pornography to the point of disrupting daily life and relationships, including intimate ones with spouses. What is actually required is neither complete suppression of the species' instinct nor letting it off its chain to excess, but regulating it through a system revealed by the Creator of human beings, their instincts and their desires. Islam gives a social system which regulates the species instinct, without non-satiation or excess. Moreover, Islam focusses the human being on the true basis of happiness, which is pleasing Allah (swt), regulating the desires in accordance to obedience to Allah (swt) and His Messenger (saw).

Dependency upon Using Pornography

The hedonistic unleashing of the instinct leads to a preoccupation with the desire, inducing biochemical changes that approach addiction, even if they do not lead to actual clinical addiction.

Pornography use leads to desensitization, which is caused by the production of large amounts of dopamine. Dopamine is the pleasure-chemical that is released when a person engages in an enjoyable activity, such as eating a tasty meal or playing a fun game. Such normal and everyday activities release healthy amounts of dopamine that the brain can process. Pornography use, however, releases such high levels of dopamine that the brain takes action against it. It does this by trimming down its number of dopamine receptors, thus reducing its responsiveness to the dopamine. This is the basis of desensitization. The problem, however, is that despite this, a part of the brain still exists that wishes to view pornography and longs for that rush of dopamine. So, to make up for the reduced responsiveness, the pornography user seeks out greater and greater degrees of stimulation; that is, more and more extreme forms of pornography. The user of pornography begins viewing pornographic material, eventually builds a tolerance to it, and then, in pursuit of a continuous supply of dopamine, increases the degree of content they view. Not only is it a cycle, but it also involves escalation.

While this process of desensitization is occurring, the brain simultaneously undergoes a second change involving sensitization. That is, in its pursuit for dopamine, the brain becomes highly sensitized to anything that reminds it of pornography; that is, any cue or signal. These signals can be anything from a woman on a magazine cover to an advert on social media. These cues, or triggers, can even be auditory. However, the effect is the same: they trigger strong cravings within the user that drive them towards viewing pornography again.

It becomes increasingly more difficult to resist these cravings because of the third change that occurs in the brain, hypofrontality, or reduced brain activity in the prefrontal region. This is caused by physical changes in the prefrontal region's grey and white matter. It is due to hypofrontality that despite an inner desire to want to give up pornography, users find it hard to resist desires, losing inhibition.

The fourth significant change to the brain is within dysfunctional stress circuits which are related to the brain's ability to control stress. Due to the dysfunctions caused to the brain by repeatedly viewing pornography, users find it hard to deal with even minor sources of stress. These minor stresses often activate the sensitized parts of the brain, which lead to cravings, which lead to a desire to view more pornographic material.

In addition, DeltaFosB is a protein that is produced every time dopamine is released. The more dopamine released, the more DeltaFosB accumulates. The function of DeltaFosB is that it enforces the memory of watching pornography and the feelings of pleasure associated with such viewing. Essentially, it makes the brain remember just how pleasurable pornography is. It is the reason pornography users have cravings and a desire to continue viewing pornographic material. DeltaFosB is what keeps the cycle of use going.

So, the desire to watch pornography is created by the act of watching pornography itself. It is the viewing of pornography that leads to dopamine production, which leads to the accumulation of DeltaFosB, which leads to the intensification of cravings. Therefore, the only way to get rid of the desire for pornography once and for all is to not give into the desire, but to resist it. Giving in only perpetuates the cycle. Resisting it is what allows the brain to heal and for the cravings to go away. According to most studies, it takes one to two months for DeltaFosB in the brain to dissipate but it can take even less time for the desire to watch pornography to go away. Of course, none of this means that the cycle of use cannot be broken.

Ending Use of Pornography at an Individual Level

The first thing that must be firmly established in the mind of any person seeking to give up the use of pornography is that viewing pornographic material is a sin. Therefore, the motivation to give up pornographic material must be that it is a sin and persisting in it without stopping and repenting will, if Allah (swt) wishes, lead to punishment in the Hereafter.

Use of pornography is impermissible in Islam regardless of whether they are photographs as opposed to real bodies. This is because of the legal principle (Qaidah Shar'iyah) which states that, "الوسيلة إلى الحرام حرام" "the means to Haram is Haram." The means in this case does not have to lead to haram with certainty, but with mere preponderant likelihood (غلب على الظن). The evidence of the Qaidah (principle) is the Ayah, ﴿وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ﴾ "Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance." [TMQ Surah An-An'aam 6:108]. Allah (swt) disallowed the insult, for it causes the insulting of Allah (swt). So the Qaidah forbids all that inevitably leads to sin. Pornography indeed leads to other sins, such as gazing at women lustfully, seductive flirting, free mixing between genders, unlawful touching, stalking, harassment, assault, fornication, adultery, homosexuality and rape.

The purpose of clarifying this is so that when the afflicted Muslim begins the journey of overcoming their usage, their intentions are sincere and there are no doubts left in their mind that may produce only a half-hearted attempt at ending pornography use.

Now that we understand the nature of the use of pornography and its characteristics, we can begin to discuss the way to overcome it.

What we understand about the use of pornography and its cycle of use is in line with what the 'ulema understood to be the characteristics of sin.

In his book, *Spiritual Diseases and their Cures*, Ibn al-Qayyim (rh) says on the nature of sin, “Sins lead to the production of other sins, until one finds it hard to give them up. An ‘alim, of the past has said, “Among the punishments for a sin is committing a subsequent sin. And among the recompenses for a good deed is doing a subsequent good deed. When a person does a good deed, another good deed besides it says: “Do me as well.” If he does it, a third one says likewise, and so on; therefore, his good deeds, and recompense for them, increase. The same thing occurs (but in a negative way) when a person commits a sin.”

The goal is to resist the desires long enough so that each subsequent desire is weaker than the last. Eventually the withdrawal symptoms dissipate and the dependency is overcome. So, how then can a Muslim who wishes to rid themselves of such a habit protect themselves from these desires and consequently overcome the dependency?

Repentance Overcomes Sins

The Prophet (saw) said, «لَوْ أَخْطَأْتُمْ حَتَّى تَبْلُغَ خَطَايَاكُمْ السَّمَاءَ ثُمَّ تَنْتَبَهُ لَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ» **“If you were to commit sin until your sins reach the heaven, then you were to repent, your repentance would be accepted.”** (Ibn Majah). The first step to overcoming the habit and turning towards Allah (swt) for help is for a person to admit their sins and repent to Allah (swt).

It was narrated from Abu Hurairah (ra) that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ إِذَا أَذْنَبَ كَانَتْ نُكْتَةً سَوْدَاءَ فِي قَلْبِهِ فَإِنْ تَابَ وَنَزَعَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ صُفِّلَ قَلْبُهُ فَإِنْ زَادَ زَادَتْ فَذَلِكَ الرَّانُ الَّذِي ذَكَرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ ﴿كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ﴾» **“When the believer commits sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents and gives up that sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished. But if (the sin) increases, (the black spot) increases. That is the Ran that Allah mentions in His Book: “Nay! But on their hearts is the Ran (covering of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn.” [TMQ 83:14]”** [Ibn Majah]. Even if a person repents and later gives into a desire and sins again, they must repent again. Allah (swt) is the Oft-Forgiving and the Most Merciful and is willing to accept repentance for repeated sins.

The Prophet (saw) said, «إِنَّ عَبْدًا أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا فَقَالَ: رَبِّ أَذْنَبْتُ فَاعْفِرْهُ فَقَالَ رَبُّهُ: أَعْلَمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ؟ غَفَرْتُ لِعَبْدِي ثُمَّ مَكَتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا فَقَالَ: رَبِّ أَذْنَبْتُ ذَنْبًا فَاعْفِرْهُ فَقَالَ رَبُّهُ: أَعْلَمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ؟ غَفَرْتُ لِعَبْدِي ثُمَّ مَكَتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا قَالَ: رَبِّ أَذْنَبْتُ ذَنْبًا آخَرَ فَاعْفِرْ لِي فَقَالَ: أَعْلَمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ؟ غَفَرْتُ لِعَبْدِي فَلْيَفْعَلْ مَا شَاءَ» **“If a servant who committed a sin and said, “My Lord, I have sinned, so forgive me.” His Lord replied, “Does My servant know that he has a Lord Who pardons sin and punishes for it? I have pardoned My servant.” After remaining [obedient] such time as Allah willed, he committed a sin and said, “My Lord, I have sinned, so forgive me.” His Lord replied, “Does My servant know that he has a Lord Who pardons sin and punishes for it? I have pardoned my servant.” Then after remaining [obedient] such time as Allah willed, he committed a sin and said, “My Lord, I have committed another sin, so forgive me.” He replied, “Does My servant know that he has a Lord Who pardons sin and punishes for it? I have pardoned my servant, so let him do what he likes.” ”** [Bukhari and Muslim]

From his *Sharh of Sahih al-Muslim*, Imam al-Nawawi (rh) said regarding the above hadith, “...even if the sin is repeated a hundred times or a thousand times or more, and he repents each time, his repentance will be accepted and his sin will be erased. And if he repents once from them all, his repentance will be valid.”

Not even once should the Muslim fall into a state of hopelessness and stop seeking out the forgiveness of Allah (swt). This is a trick of Shaytan and to stop seeking Allah (swt)’s forgiveness is to deny that He (swt) is Ar-Raheem, which is in itself sinful denial.

The believer must ensure, however, that every time they repent, their repentance is sincere, they earnestly resolve to never repeat the sin again, and that they seek refuge in Allah (swt) from the whispers of Shaytan.

Having Tawwakul in Allah (swt) and Seeking His Protection

Tawwakul is to have sincere trust in Allah (swt) and to understand that He (swt) alone is the Mawla (Protector) of the believers. When a heart is filled with a desire for something, Shaytan attempts to arouse those desires with whispers, whispers which inspire temptation and the inclination to sin. Therefore, a person that aims to subdue his desires to watch pornography must understand the threat that Shaytan poses and hence seek the protection of Allah (swt). We see that it was the habit of the Prophet (saw) and his Companions (ra) to seek refuge in Allah (swt) from the whispers of Shaytan.

The way to obtain the protection of Allah (swt) is to increase one's remembrance of Him (swt). In his book, "Marvels of the Heart," Imam al-Ghazali (rh) gives the following advice, "The remembrance of Allah is the safe side, for it is known that there is no room for Shaytan there. A thing is treated only by its opposite, and the opposite of all the evil suggestions of Shaytan is the remembrance of Allah by seeking refuge with Him and disclaiming strength and power. This is what you mean when you say: "I seek refuge with Allah from Shaytan the Stoned", and: "There is no strength nor power save in Allah the Most High, Almighty." This can be done only by the pious in whom the remembrance of Allah predominates, and Shaytan only approaches them as a sly trick at the times of their blunders. Allah says, إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠١﴾ **Indeed, those who fear Allah – when an impulse touches them from Shaytan, they remember (Him) and at once they have insight.**" [Surah al-A'raf, verse 201]."

So when the whispers infiltrate the mind and the temptation arises, the way to resist is to turn towards Allah (swt).

Avoidance of the Place of Sin and Engagement in Good Deeds

An advice often provided by the 'ulema to those seeking to overcome their sins is that rather than fighting the desire to sin, it is better to avoid those places and those things which incite the desire.

Above, we mentioned triggers which arouse the senses and incline the heart towards pornography. These signals and triggers must be identified in their form and in their places and the believer must make efforts to avoid them as much as possible.

It is when the believer is idle and not busy in the worship of Allah (swt) that his mind becomes susceptible to the persuasions of Shaytan. Involuntary thoughts inspired by Shaytan can creep their way into the mind and because the person has nothing to busy themselves with, the thoughts establish themselves firmly in the mind and become difficult to subdue. So, it is advised that the believer should avoid laziness and avoid idleness. Instead, believers occupy themselves with that which is good for them in this life and the Hereafter.

There are many benefits of doing good deeds but here we will discuss two: The first is that doing good deeds wipes away a believer's bad deeds. The second is that a believer who is upright in his performance of good deeds enjoys the protection of Allah (swt) and, as such, finds safety from the whispers of Shaytan. The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «اتَّقِ اللَّهَ حَيْثُمَا «**Have taqwa (fear) of Allah wherever you may be, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards the people.**" [at-Tirmidhi].

Amongst the best of all deeds is the performance of the five obligatory prayers in their appointed times. The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «أَرَأَيْتُمْ لَوْ أَنَّ نَهْرًا بَبَابِ أَحَدِكُمْ يَغْتَسِلُ فِيهِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ «**Tell me, if there were a river at the door of one of you in which he washed five times daily, would any of his filthiness remain?**" When he received the reply that none of it would remain, he said, «ذَلِكَ مِثْلُ الصَّلَوَاتِ الْخَمْسِ يَمْحُو اللَّهُ بِهِنَ الْخَطَايَا» **That is like the five times of prayer by which Allah obliterates sins.**" [Bukhari and Muslim].

Beyond the fulfillment of their obligatory deeds, a person should also increase their performance of voluntary good deeds. Many 'ulema in their books stress upon the importance of reading the Noble Qur'an daily, within one's capacity. The nightly prayers (tahajjud) are also one of the best deeds a person can perform, as is the fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. The Prophet (saw) said for the unmarried, **«مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ مِنْكُمُ الْبَاءَةَ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَعَلَيْهِ بِالصَّوْمِ فَإِنَّهُ لَهُ وَجَاءٌ»** **“Whoever among you can afford to get married, let him do so, and whoever cannot afford it should fast, for it will be a restraint (wija) for him”** [An-Nasa'i].

It should also be noted by anyone attempting to give up their habit that every time a thought to watch pornography arises, if the believer resists the desire and does not engage in sin, that is counted as a good deed in itself. The Prophet (saw) said, **«إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ الْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ، ثُمَّ بَيَّنَّ ذَلِكَ: فَمَنْ هَمَّ بِحَسَنَةٍ فَلَمْ يَعْمَلْهَا، كَتَبَهَا اللَّهُ لَهُ عِنْدَهُ عَشْرَ حَسَنَاتٍ، إِلَى سَبْعِمِائَةٍ ضِعْفٍ، إِلَى أَضْعَافٍ كَثِيرَةٍ، وَمَنْ هَمَّ بِسَيِّئَةٍ فَلَمْ يَعْمَلْهَا، كَتَبَهَا اللَّهُ لَهُ عِنْدَهُ حَسَنَةً كَامِلَةً، فَإِنْ هُوَ هَمَّ بِهَا فَعَمَلَهَا، كَتَبَهَا اللَّهُ لَهُ عِنْدَهُ حَسَنَةً كَامِلَةً، فَإِنْ هُوَ هَمَّ بِهَا فَعَمَلَهَا، كَتَبَهَا اللَّهُ سَيِّئَةً وَاحِدَةً»** **“Allah decreed good deeds and bad deeds, then He explained that; whoever thinks of doing a good deed then does not do it, Allah will write it down as one complete good deed. If he thinks of doing a good deed and then does it, Allah will write it down between ten and seven hundred fold, or many more. If he thinks of doing a bad deed then he does not do it, Allah will write it down as one complete good deed, and if he thinks of it then does it, Allah will write it down as one bad deed.”** [Bukhari and Muslim].

Ibn al-Qayyim (rh) said about the protection that comes with the performance of good deeds, “...Indeed, by remembering Allah (swt), giving sadaqah, enjoining good and forbidding evil, one would be shielded from any evil inspirations. It is like the immune system, resisting any invasion of the body. Good deeds and misdeeds are two opposites in constant conflict, so whenever the good side increases in power, one's resistance becomes stronger; for Allah (swt) defends those who believe; and belief (faith is expressed in both words and actions...”

Guarding Chastity, Lowering the Gaze and Avoiding Fantasizing

In the Noble Book of Allah, the believers are instructed, **«قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا أَرْوَاحَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَرْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ»** **“Tell the believing men to lower from their gaze, and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do.”** [TMQ Surah An-Nur 24:30]. Whilst the look of recognition is permitted, the lustful look is forbidden as is the look upon the forbidden. A person cannot always be blamed for what their eyes see but once the forbidden is sighted, they must remember Allah (swt) and lower their gaze. So the first accidental glance is allowed, but it is a sin to prolong it into or follow it up with a deliberate, lustful gaze. The Prophet (saw) said: **«يَا عَلِيُّ لَا تُتْبِعِ النَّظْرَةَ النَّظْرَةَ فَإِنَّ لَكَ الْأُولَى وَلَيْسَتْ لَكَ الْآخِرَةُ»** **“Oh Ali, do not take a second look, because while you are not to blame for the first, you have no right for the second.”** [at-Tirmidhi and Musnad Ahmad]. Not only is continuing to stare lustfully a sin itself, but it arouses desires that can lead to more sins.

Ibn al-Qayyim (rh) said: “...Indeed, looking produces desire; desire produces thoughts; thoughts produce passion; passion produces will power which turns into strong determination, and ends up as an action, as long as there is no impediment. In this context, it was said: “Patience in lowering one's gaze is easier (to deal with) than the patience with the pain of the aftermath of that gaze.””

Fantasizing is a thought that increases the passion for the sin. It can be considered as a result of being idle. When there is nothing good to busy the mind with, the mind can easily be overcome by involuntary thoughts. If a person does not remember Allah (swt) in that moment and resist those thoughts, they may instead make the mistake of engaging with those thoughts and fantasizing. This is a mistake because it helps strengthen the power of such

thoughts and reignites desires of the heart. By fantasizing about impermissible actions, the desires may intensify and the chances of sinning again increase. Therefore, it is encouraged that the person forces away such thoughts instead of entertaining them by remembering Allah (swt).

Ibn al-Qayyim (rh) said: “You should know that a desire in itself does not harm anyone; what is harmful is interacting or reacting to it. A desire is like a passerby; if you ignore it, it will go away; but if you invite it in, it would bewitch you with its deceptive speech.”

Conclusion: The Khilafah will Eliminate Pornography Use at a Societal Level

The individual remedy for the evil of pornography use lies in Islam, as does the societal remedy for its widespread use. There is a great need for Islam to be implemented at a societal level for many reasons, including the afflictions unleashed by Western hedonism upon the world. Pornography use and what it leads to of anxiety, frustration, harassment, assault, rape and deviancy is just one of hedonism’s rotten fruits. Countless lives are harmed and wasted. The hedonism of Western civilization has made humanly desires as gods, regardless of the disobedience of Allah (swt) and the harm that it brings. Allah (swt) said, ﴿أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَّمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَن يَهْدِيهِ مِن بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾ **“Have you seen (O Prophet) those who have taken their own desires as their god? (And so) Allah left them to stray knowingly, sealed their hearing and hearts, and placed a cover on their sight. Who then can guide them after Allah? Will you ‘all’ not then be mindful?”** [TMQ Surah Al-Jathiyah 45:23].

Unlike the Western civilization, the Islamic civilization is not erected on the rotten foundation of hedonism. Islam satisfies the desires of humans in a precise regulation without unleashing them in an excessive manner. Islam makes human desires subservient to obedience of Allah (swt). The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونَ هَوَاهُ تَبَعًا لِمَا» **“None of you [truly] believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.”** [Imam an-Nawawi]. So Islamic rulings regulate the relationship between men and women, maintaining chastity, dignity and honor. Islamic rulings regulate the marriage between men and women leading to healthy, happy and productive unions. And Islamic rulings regulate the form of education, media and social media, creating an atmosphere where humanity is directed to its real purpose in this temporary worldly life, the worship of Allah (swt). Indeed, it is the Khilafah (Caliphate) on the Method of Prophethood that will focus the entire world on the true origin of happiness, which is seeking the pleasure of Allah (swt).

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