

The Importance of Hayaa in Protecting Marriage and the Family Unit

The Arabic word “Hayaa” is a difficult term to translate into English. It is most often translated as meaning: modesty, self-respect, shyness, shame, humility, honour and bashfulness.

Hayaa is an attribute which helps the believer stay away from actions which are disliked by Allah (swt). This is because “Hayaa” causes the believer to experience feelings of unease when coming into contact with actions that are considered to be immoral or indecent with regards to compromising our modesty or chastity. The believers experience these feelings because they are reminded of their relationship to their Creator, Al Baseer (The All Seeing).

This is why it is seen as a very important concept within Islam. In fact, it is described as one of the defining characteristics of Islam, which has a strong connection to one’s Iman, as mentioned in the following hadith: « إِنَّ الْحَيَاءَ وَالْإِيمَانَ قَرْنَا جَمِيعًا، فَإِذَا رُفِعَ أَحَدُهُمَا رُفِعَ الْآخَرُ » **“Indeed hayaa (modesty) and Iman are Companions. When one of them is lifted, the other leaves as well.”** (Al-Bayhaqi)

Hayaa together with our Iman helps us to remind ourselves of the limits set by our Creator (swt) on how we should behave. It helps us control our urges and desires, and so guides our behaviour in a way pleasing to Allah (swt). We guard our modesty and stay away from indecency when we have Hayaa because we are aware of our relationship with Allah, and hence wary of even approaching close to anything that could be considered as immoral. In other words having Hayaa will help the believers in upholding their duty towards Allah in the same way that it will help them commit to their duties and responsibility toward others, as we will understand that refraining from these actions would lead to displeasing Allah.

Not having Hayaa could therefore be detrimental to a Muslim. The Prophet (saw) has said about the one who has no Hayaa: « إِذَا لَمْ تَسْتَحْيِ فَاصْنَعْ مَا شِئْتَ » **“If you feel no shame then do as you wish.”** (Al-Bukhari 3484)

The scholar Al-Haafiz said the words, “then do as you wish” is meant as a threat, i.e., do as you wish and Allah will requite you.

Unfortunately, the reality is that Muslims are in danger of losing their understanding of this important quality because of the influences of secular liberal values which actually state the opposite of what is meant by the words of our Prophet (saw). They actually do send out the message: **“you should do as you wish”**. This message is having a great influence on our private life and with the dealings with others, in particular concerning male-female relationships where the liberal vision of this relationship differs profoundly from that of Islam.

This is one of the reasons why we are seeing the rate of divorce rising amongst the Muslim community because the Islamic concept that the close or intimate relationship between the sexes is only allowed within the framework of marriage is changing due to the prevalence of western liberal ideas amongst Muslims. This is the case within the Muslim world and within Muslim communities living in the West.

This view of life where “one can do as one pleases” is having an influence on key concepts related to hayaa in Islam. These are changing rapidly and are having a negative impact on married life and hence the unity of the family unit.

1) The free mixing of men and women in the private and public life

Muslims are become less and less aware that in Islam, the basic principle of the interaction between men and women is segregation. This is because this idea differs with that which is promoted in western liberal societies, where the general mixing between the sexes is common and encouraged at every level of society.

From the billboard on the side of the roads to the advertisements we see and hear on radio and television, there are no restrictions put on the interaction between men and woman. That uneasy feeling which a Muslim should feel when interacting freely with somebody from the opposite sex will naturally decline when the general message around us, especially in the popular culture of society, is telling one that it’s perfectly acceptable for them to do so.

For this reason, it is important to remind ourselves what Allah has revealed on matters and how He obliges both men and woman to have Hayaa when interacting with one another. ﴿قُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾ **“Tell the believing men to lower from their gaze and to protect their private parts; that is better for them. Allah knows the details of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower from their gaze and protect their private parts.”** [An- Nur: 30] ﴿وَقُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَخْرُجْنَ بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ﴾ **“And they are not to show their charm except that which is apparent. And let them cover their chests and necks with their head covers (khimars)”**. [An- Nur: 31]

Hence, we are obliged to guard ourselves from anything which may lead to compromising our modesty or chastity.

2) Prevalence of licentious material around us.

Much of what is on television, and in music or on the internet involves the promotion of indecent scenes and lewd immoral behaviour. Even so we often spend our time watching these programs often surrounded by our families or listening to such songs. Nearly every popular series or movie will have a story line which depicts some kind of immoral relationship such as pre-marital or extra-marital relationships. These programs actually serve to normalize and desensitize our emotions toward concepts which are forbidden for us, such as nudity, extramarital relationships, homosexuality and vulgar behaviour etc.

For instance, watching pornography has also been proven to cause trouble within married life, yet it is freely available. A recent survey revealed that 80% of men in the US between the ages of 18 and 30 admit watching it on a regular basis. It is a problem which is also unfortunately affecting Muslims. Watching these sexualised degrading images of woman, turns them into objects whose sole purpose is to gratify men’s desires. What effect will this have on the relationship between a husband and wife? These images pave the way for all kinds of lewd behaviour.

However, understanding the concept of hayaa and sharia principle that **“the means to Haram is also Haram”** aids the Muslim to shun watching, listening to or engaging in any action which could harm their sense of modesty.

Therefore, Hayaa is essential in helping us stay away from this kind of behaviour and will help us build inner accountability so that we will not be prone to sinning even in the comfort and privacy of our own homes due to our awareness of our relationship with Allah and the accountability we have towards Him.

3) Hayaa and the Islamic dress code

Hayaa is also an important concept to apply with regards to the dress code for the Muslim woman and the man, so that they avoid dressing in a way to attract anyone who is non-mahrem to them. For the Muslim woman, this means following the Islamic dress codes entirely and comprehensively, which includes avoiding the concept of tabarruj, which is beautifying herself in the presence of non-Mahrem men (those men to whom marriage is permissible) such as wearing any form of dress, jewellery or make-up which enhances her attractiveness.

Today, unfortunately, much of what is contained in the so-called “Islamic fashion industry” does not conform to the Islamic rules on dresscode or the Islamic concept of Hayaa, for they are aimed at beautifying the woman in public life. We see for example, many Muslim sisters wearing the khimar or even the jilbab but the form of the dress is tabarruj, or the way they walk, talk or interact with men is completely at odds with what the dress should represent of hayaa. Hence the khimar is often worn as a fashion statement and in a way that enhances the beauty of the woman rather than in a manner that reflects the understanding of what it should represent for the Muslim woman with regards to Hayah and guarding her modesty and chastity.

For the Muslim man, having Hayah means following the Islamic rules in the way they dress and behave, for instance the manner in which Muslim men and women speak to each other, ensuring that it is not in a free and open manner, socialising and joking with each other, and hence disregarding the limits that Allah (swt) has placed on their interaction. This type of

interaction doesn't find its origin within Islam and it is the concept of Hayaa which should protect us from socializing with the opposite sex in such a manner.

4) The trust between a husband and wife:

In the West, it is considered to be quite normal to speak with friends and others about ones most intimate details we share with our spouse. Islam on the other hand holds a very different opinion on this matter.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: «إِنَّ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْأَمَانَةِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ الرَّجُلُ يُفْضِي إِلَى امْرَأَتِهِ وَتُفْضِي إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ يَنْشُرُ سِرَّهَا» **“On the Day of Judgment before Allah the greatest act of misappropriation will be that a man may love his wife and the wife may also be inclined towards her husband and then he may disclose his wife’s secrets to others”** (Muslim).

Sharing intimate details about our marriages to family members, friends and others besides being haram, leads to an array of problems such as dissatisfactions, envy, jealousy, gossip, etc. Therefore we should be aware of Allah’s dislike of this kind of behaviour and have Hayaa when we speak about our spouse to others.

We should not only refrain from speaking about intimate details we should also be aware to protect our spouse from all kinds of harmful speech. We should keep their faults hidden and protect them from any kind of humiliation and ridicule.

Islam considers spouses to be garments of each other. **«هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ»** **“They (your wives) are your garments, and you are their garments”** [2:187].

When contemplating the meaning of garment, it has the purpose of protecting one’s body of all kinds of harmful elements. Therefore, we should protect our spouses from every kind of harm that is in our hands, starting with not discussing each other’s faults to the outside world just for the sake of complaining to others.

In conclusion, Hayaa is a protecting characteristic Muslims need to have. It helps us remain on the right path by creating that uncomfortable feeling towards anything which compromises our modesty, oversteps the Limits of Allah in our interaction with the opposite sex, or leads to displeasing Allah (swt). This feeling is actually a strength which helps prevent the believers from indulging in indecency and obscenity. For this reason, it is vital to embody this quality such that it shapes all aspects of our life, including within the institution of marriage where we are in a most private relationship with another. To have Hayaa in all matters concerning our spouse is vital to strengthening the bond with each other based on mutual trust. Hayaa will also help us keep our urges and feelings of lust within the boundaries set by Allah.

We need to understand the difficulties of living in societies – in the West and the Muslim world - where Hayaa plays no role and where it isn’t a quality which is held in high regard. In fact, within secular liberal states, the concept of modesty is often ridiculed, shunned, scorned upon, and labelled as backward. Therefore, the dangers will still remain even when we as an individual do our utmost to sustain this quality. This is because Hayaa is a necessity for society at large to embody in order to help all its citizens to uphold moral and righteous behaviour. Only the Islamic system of governance, implemented under the Khilafah (Caliphate) based upon the method of the Prophethood, which truly values the importance of this concept and such elevated behaviour, can ensure that Hayaa and Taqwa become defining characteristics of the society.

Allah Almighty reminds us of the people who have lost their sense of Hayaa in the following verse:

«إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ»

“Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread [or publicized] among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. And Allah knows and you do not know.” [24:19]

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