

Chastity – Essential for Preservation of the Institution of Marriage

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Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High. Who creates and perfects, and Who designs and guides. (*Al-A'la*, 87:2-4)

The second Condition of *Bai'at*, as laid out by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as}, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi of this age, reads:

He/She shall keep away from falsehood, fornication, adultery, trespasses of the eye, debauchery, mischief and rebellion; and will not permit himself/herself to be carried away by passions, however strong they may be.

The announced topic of my speech is Chastity – Essential for Preservation of the Institution of Marriage. However, in Islam, chastity is essential for achieving the Purpose of our Creation (that purpose being the worship of Allah through complete submission to His Will), and marriage is a means of preserving one's chastity. Therefore, I have elected to deviate from the assigned topic and focus more on the broader Islamic teachings about chastity and their ramifications.

In a modest Islamic society open discussion on chastity is deemed taboo. In this society, however, chastity is taboo. Here chastity is not considered much of a value. Under the 'don't ask, don't tell' modus operandi, it is rather immaterial whether one is chaste or not; incitements and opportunities for unchaste behavior abound; and chaste behavior is perceived geeky, un-cool or antisocial.

To get a sense of how unchaste this society has become, consider a reality check survey recently posted on CNN.com.ⁱ According to this survey, 95% of Americans have had premarital sex. Add to it the post-marital adulterous behavior, and then the same-sex relationships – you get the picture. I hope and pray that we Ahmadi Muslims are in the less than 5% chaste minority.

In this shameless environment, the weak or naïve are at a serious risk of unwittingly slipping into unchaste behavior. It is this alarming prospect that compels us to have a candid discussion on this topic so we can develop a better appreciation of this precious virtue.

First let me clarify a couple of myths. It is a myth that chastity applies to only unmarried women. Chastity is a virtue that is as essential for the married as it is for the unmarried, both men and women. It is also a myth that chastity is a personal and physical choice. Chastity is a necessity for the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual well being of not only the individual but his or her family and ultimately the society at large.

Now, what is chastity? The root word for chastity in Arabic is *iffa* which means purity, modesty, decency, virtue, abstinence, and continence (that is self-restraint, especially from sexual intercourse).

CHASTE primarily implies a refraining from acts or even thoughts or desires that are not virginal or not sanctioned by the marriage vows.

PURE differs from CHASTE in implying innocence and absence of temptations rather than control of one's impulses and actions.

MODEST and DECENT apply especially to deportment and dress as outward signs of inward chastity and purity.

The Promised Messiah^{as} explains chastity as *ihसान* (with a *suad*). He writes:

This expression connotes the virtue that is related to the faculty of procreation of men and women. Those men and women would be called chaste who refrain altogether from illicit sex and all approaches to it, the consequence of which is disgrace and humiliation for both parties in this world and chastisement in the hereafter, and dishonor and grave harm for those related to them.ⁱⁱ

Explaining the significance and criticality of chastity in his Commentary on *Surah Al-Noor*, Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II^{ra} writes:

Chastity as a moral virtue holds a very high place in the code of Islamic laws that govern relation between sexes. This *Surah* has laid down comprehensive commandments to safeguard and protect it. Islam views even the slightest breach of these laws with extreme disapprobation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sexual urges are natural just like any other human urge, and no urge is inherently good or bad; it is how we react to it that determines our goodness. And, the criteria for goodness and the proper response to all natural urges are determined by our

Creator. As I recited the Qur'anic verses in the beginning, all praise belongs to Him Who has not only designed and created and perfected everything, but Who has provided us with the Holy Qur'an, the perfect guidance for how to properly use and benefit from His design and creation.

Thus, the Qur'anic Teachings are like the laws of nature. If we breach these laws we suffer the consequences thereof, like fire burns and poison kills; and we don't have to get burned to realize that playing with fire is risky. Regarding the sexual urges, the Holy Qur'an fundamentally teaches us total abstinence before marriage and extra-marital abstinence after marriage. This in a nutshell is chastity. All other related teachings are to explain, promote and facilitate chastity.

In abstract, the Islamic teachings and expectations about chastity and the consequences of unchaste behavior may seem idealistic, too harsh and untenable, especially in our promiscuous society. However, if we consider Islamic teachings holistically, chastity is not only germane to the purpose of our creation, it is essential for our physical, moral and spiritual success.

Thus, we must focus on preventing unchaste behavior. The Promised Messiah^{as} writes that, as this vice and its preliminaries can be practiced by both men and women, Allah has set forth directions in the Holy Qur'an for both of them. He explains *Surah Al-Noor (24:31-32)*, as follows:

Direct the believing men to restrain their eyes from looking at women outside the prohibited degrees so openly as to be sexually excited by them, and to cultivate the habit of guarding their looks. They should safeguard all their senses. For instance, they should not listen to the singing or charming voice of women outside the prohibited degrees nor should they listen to descriptions of their beauty. This is a good way of preserving the purity of their looks and hearts. In the same way, direct the believing women that they should restrain their eyes from looking at men outside the prohibited degrees and should safeguard their ears against listening to the passionate voice of such men. They should cover up their beauty and should not disclose it to anyone outside the prohibited degrees.^{iv}

The Prohibited Degrees referred to here are clearly mentioned in *Surah Al-Noor (24:32)*, and mean the persons whom we are prohibited to marry. So, any person whom we can conceivably marry would be outside the Prohibited Degrees, including cousins and boy-friends or girl-friends of friends.

Now, *purdah* and *ghadd-e-basar* are the two fundamental concepts that underlie the chaste behavior. Expounding on the philosophy of *purdah*, the Promised Messiah^{as} writes:

The Book of God does not aim at keeping women in seclusion like prisoners. The purpose of these regulations is to restrain men and women from letting their eyes rove freely and from displaying their good looks and beauty, for therein lays the good both of men and of women.^v

Similarly, regarding *ghadd-e-basar*, the Promised Messiah^{as} writes:

It does not behoove a pious person, who desires to keep his heart pure, that he should lift his eyes freely in every direction like an animal. It is necessary that such a one should cultivate the habit of *ghadd-e-basar* in his social life. This is a blessed habit through which his natural impulses would be converted into a high moral quality without interfering with his social needs.^{vi}

Some people tend to argue that they live in a civilized society and that it is no big deal if they take liberties with these teachings so long as they don't do it with any bad intentions. The Promised Messiah^{as}, the Imam of this age, argues otherwise:

It should be kept in mind that as the natural condition of man, which is the source of his passions, is such that he cannot depart from it without a complete change in himself, his passions are bound to be roused, or in other words put in peril, when they are confronted with the occasion and opportunity for indulging in this vice. Therefore, God Almighty has not instructed us that we might freely gaze at women outside the prohibited degrees and might contemplate their beauty and observe all their movements in dancing etc., but that we should do so with pure looks. Nor have we been instructed to listen to the singing of these women and to lend ear to the tales of their beauty, but that we should do so with pure intent. We have been positively commanded not to look at their beauty, whether with pure intent or otherwise, nor to listen to their musical voices or to descriptions of their good looks, whether with pure intent or otherwise.^{vii}

All Khulafa have repeatedly addressed this topic in their times. Most recently, on 11/19/06, during the UK Lajna Imaillah National Ijtema, Hadhrat Khalifatul Masihul Khamis^{aba} has very candidly explained his position on this issue and instructed lajna leadership to take on this issue and lead by example. Similarly, he

has invited our young girls in the west to do and defend Islamic *purdah*. I would urge all members, men and women, to carefully listen to Hadhooor's address.

Now fornication and adultery are the inevitable consequences of unchaste behavior. Regarding adultery, we find in the Holy Qur'an:

Approach not adultery; surely, it is a foul thing and an evil way. (*Bani Israil, 17:33*)

So, to avoid the risk of fornication or adultery, the Promised Messiah^{as} writes:

One should avoid all occasions that might incite one's mind in that direction, and should eschew all the paths that might lead to this vice. He who indulges in this vice carries his viciousness to the extreme. The way of adultery is an evil way as it obstructs one's progress towards the goal and is extremely harmful to the achievement of the purpose of life.^{viii}

Let me briefly refer to some beautiful narrations recorded in the Holy Qur'an that provide us a great insight about chastity and how to preserve it.

First, let us look at the story of Joseph or Hadhrat Yusuf^{as}. He was an innocent and handsome young man. Joseph was very grateful to his host and master, Aziz, for his kindness and generosity. Aziz was a respectable leader of the city. However, his wife was attracted to Joseph and tried to seduce him. He tried to run away from her but she persisted and tore his shirt from behind. As Joseph ran to the door, Aziz walked in. To protect herself, she placed all the blame on Joseph. The Holy Qur'an narrates how Joseph persevered and preserved his innocence and honor in that vulnerable situation. It says:

She, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him against his will. And she bolted the doors, and said, 'Now come.' He said, 'I seek refuge with Allah. He is my Lord. He has made my stay with you honorable. Verily, the wrongdoers never prosper.' (*Yusuf, 12:24*)

This narrative shows that Joseph was mindful of the value of chastity and the consequences of wrongdoing. Therefore, instead of playing a victim, he invoked Allah's protection (*ma'azallah*), and was unequivocally exonerated.

I wish all our boys and men would inculcate Joseph like angelic nobility, innocence and purity. The responsibility for maintaining a chaste society rests with men. Hadhrat Ali^{rw} is reported to have said:

Be chaste and your women will be chaste.

Next, let us recall the story of the pure and truthful Mary or Hadhrat Maryam. Allah says:

Remember her who preserved her chastity. (Al-Anbiya, 21:92)

She was mortified at the prospect of being touched by a stranger when Allah's angel appeared to her as a perfect man (*basharan sawiyya*). The Holy Qur'an has recorded her exemplary anxiety to preserve her chastity and innocence as:

She said, 'I seek refuge with the Gracious One from thee.' (Maryam, 19:19)

Our girls and women need to strive for Mary like purity and truthfulness. Unfortunately, today some of our women and girls seem to be impressed by the liberalism of their Christian peers. I wish and pray that they would develop the courage and confidence to adopt Islamic modesty as a badge of their chastity and show their peers how they have lost their innocence and purity in contrast to the standard set by their mother-God, Mary.

And lastly, let us recall the story of Lot or Hadhrat Loot^{as}. His people engaged in homosexual behavior and taunted him and his family for their purity and righteousness. Allah says:

Remember Lot, when he said to his people, 'Do you commit abomination while you see *the evil thereof*? What! Do you approach men lustfully rather than women? Nay, you are indeed an ignorant people.' (Al-Naml, 27:55-56)

Lot protected himself and his family by praying:

'My Lord, save me and my family from what they do.' (A-Shuara, 26:170)

So, Allah saved Lot and his pure family and destroyed the transgressors, including his wife, with a crushing rain of stones.

Unchaste or adulterous behavior is deemed so abhorrent in Islam that Allah has prescribed its severe consequences in the Holy Qur'an (*Al-Noor, 24:3-4*) as:

The adulteress and the adulterer – flog each one of them with a hundred stripes.

The adulterer cannot have sexual intercourse but with an adulteress or an idolatrous woman, and an adulteress – none can have sexual intercourse with her but an adulterer or an idolatrous man.

These consequences, a severe physical punishment on the one hand and a frightening isolation from chaste believers on the other, are in addition to the natural consequences of disease, infidelity, broken homes, promiscuity, etc.

Now let us look at the role of marriage in Islam. One of the noble purposes of marriage is preservation of chaste behavior. In Islam, marriage is called *hisn*, that is to say, it is like a fort for the husband and the wife to protect each other from any outside physical, emotional or moral attacks and to remain chaste and pure. The married man is called *muhassan* (which means fortified, entrenched or immune) and the married woman is called *muhsina* (which means sheltered and chaste). In Islam, husband and wife are also likened to mutual garments, that is to say, they cover each other's weaknesses, enhance each other's strengths, and protect each other from the environment.

In short, Islamic Marriage requires utmost commitment and fidelity, the hallmarks of chastity and modesty.

The Holy Prophet^{saws} is reported to have said:

Marriage is my precept and my practice. Those who do not follow my practice are not of me. (*Ibn Majah*)

When a man has married he has completed one half of his religion. (*Mishkat*)

Inferring from *Surah Al-Noor (24:34)* that marriage is a means to preserve chastity, the Promised Messiah^{as} writes:

Those who find no means of marriage should keep themselves chaste through the adoption of other means; like fasting or dieting or exercise.^{ix}

Now, Islam being the perfect and complete religion for all peoples and for all times, Allah has provided a remedy for any past indiscretions that may have been carried out due to ignorance or heat of the moment. We find in the Holy Qur'an:

Those who, when they commit a foul deed or wrong themselves, remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins – and who can forgive sins except Allah? – And do not persist knowingly in what they have done. (*Al-Imran, 3:136*)

We shudder at even the thought of any Ahmadi Muslim engaging in fornication or adultery; what we are concerned with is how to prevent and protect all Ahmadi Muslims from getting close to even its preliminaries. Therefore, in light of the above, I would list some dos and don'ts to preserve and nurture chastity.

Some Risky Behaviors to Avoid:

The Holy Prophet^{saw} is reported to have said:

A man shall never be alone with a woman except that the third party between them is Satan. (*Tirmidhi*)

A man must not look at another man's genitals, nor must a woman look at another woman's genitals; nor should two naked men lie under one cover, nor two naked women under the same cover. (*Muslim*)

- Vain pursuits
- Flirting/Dating
- Playful demeanor
- Wandering/Gazing eyes
- Immodest appearance/dress
- Secret paramours/relationships
- Fantasizing about the opposite sex
- Posting bios/pictures on internet sites
- Idolizing movie stars, singers, athletes, etc.
- Unnecessary frankness with cousins/friends
- Unnecessary communication with the opposite sex

- Addiction to salacious TV, movies, music, parties, etc.
- Addiction to pornographic books/magazines, tabloids, etc.
- Addiction to gossip, cell phones, internet chat-rooms, IMs, etc.

Some Ways to Avoid Risky Behavior:

- Be selective
- Rid passivity
- Limit TV time
- Limit Internet time
- Avoid bad company
- Avoid/Limit movies
- Avoid/Limit Cable/Dish TV
- Segregate sexes in private gatherings
- Increase candid communication with elders

Some Ways to Promote Chaste Behavior:

- Perform *salaat*
- Increase MTA time
- Keep good company
- Study lives of the prophets
- Increase Mosque/Jama'at time
- Read classical/historical literature
- Increase quality time with the family
- Engage in jama'at/community activities, sports, etc.
- Read biographies of great pioneers, leaders, scholars, etc.

Sure it is difficult to remain chaste in this society. But, as Ahmadi Muslims, we must sincerely and seriously strive to fulfill the second condition of *bai'at* I recited earlier. If we consider ourselves to be the *aakhareena minhum*, the community of *sahabah*, we have to find ways to live like one.

This society, with its 95% plus unchaste population, seems to have lost its battle for chastity. We, as Ahmadi Muslims, have the sacred responsibility to remain steadfast in chastity and to lead others to the chaste path with our personal conduct and fervent prayers. May Allah enable us to do so. *Ameen*.

I will conclude my presentation with one more story. We know fire burns yet there are those who want to feel the pain of burning to deter them from wrong doing. Once upon a time there was a rich man who had a beautiful young daughter. She went to a picnic with her friends. Upon their return it got dark and stormy and she got separated from her friends. She was scared and lost her way home. In the dark she saw dim light in a small mosque. She knocked at the door hoping to have someone guide her to her home. A young man opened the door and told her that he himself was new to the area and was temporarily staying in the mosque. He suggested, however, that if she wished she could stay in the mosque till the morning and when the locals would come for *Salaatul Fajr* they would guide her home. Scared of the dark night and lightning and thunder, she gingerly accepted his offer and stepped in.

The next morning she got home safely and told her father her story and said that she could not sleep all night because she watched the young man in the mosque burn all his fingers one by one. Her father was equally awed and went to his spiritual teacher. The holy wise man asked him to send for the man. When the man came, the holy wise teacher asked him about that night. The man said that he was a young man alone with a young woman in that dark night. Satan urged him to approach her but he thought of the fire of hell as the consequence. So he thought that he would put his finger on the candle flame and if he could tolerate the pain of burning, he would approach her. But the pain was too severe to tolerate so he pulled his hand and resisted the temptation. After a while Satan incited him again and he burned his second finger. He said thus he burned all his fingers but preserved his and her chastity.

The holy wise man asked the rich man to marry her daughter to that man. The rich man said how could he do that as his daughter was raised in a comfortable environment and that man was but a poor orphan. The holy wise man told the rich man that you can make him rich with some of your wealth but you can not find such piety in a wealthy man. The rich man complied and married his daughter to that young man.

The holy wise man was none other than Hakeem Maulvi Nooruddin who later accepted the Imam of this age and became Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I^{ra}.^x

In the end, I pray for all our youth in behalf of the concerned parents:

Our Lord, grant us of our spouses and children the delight of our eyes, and make us a model for the righteous. (*Al-Furqan, 25:75*)



Reality check: 95 percent of Americans had premarital sex

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NEW YORK (AP) -- More than nine out of 10 Americans, men and women alike, have had premarital sex, according to a new study. The high rates extend even to women born in the 1940s, challenging perceptions that people were more chaste in the past.

"This is reality-check research," said the study's author, Lawrence Finer. "Premarital sex is normal behavior for the vast majority of Americans, and has been for decades."

ⁱⁱ Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 26.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Holy Qur'an with English translation and commentary, edited by Malik Ghulam Farid. (1969). Footnote #2026 (*Al-Noor*, 24:3).

^{iv} Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 27-28.

^v Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 30.

^{vi} Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 30.

^{vii} Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 29.

^{viii} Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 28.

^{ix} Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. (1979). *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Islam International Publications Ltd.: London. 28.

^x Hayat-e-Noor. 67-69.