Why Common Islamic Advice Is Keeping Muslims Addicted To Pornography
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About Purify Your Gaze

We are an organization dedicated to the single purpose of empowering Muslims struggling with pornography and other sexual behaviors on their journeys to healing and change. This is our calling. Since 2009 we’ve helped thousands of Muslims from over 35 different countries.
Sister Fatima was an avid student of sacred knowledge. She spent her days teaching the Qur’an and learning about Allah and His Prophet (salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam).

To her family, her community, her teachers, she had earned an impeccable reputation as the dutiful daughter; the community activist; the hard working, model student. She in her own words told me that she was one of the few who “had it together”. But when the classes ended, when the community event was over, when she was all alone, she led a secret life that involved the seeking out of pornographic material online.

She had managed to keep this secret life completely hidden since her early teens. The emotional-psychological-spiritual pain really hit when she relapsed. She couldn’t be in denial then and pretend she didn’t have a problem. She hated herself, she was angry at life, she was angry at Allah.

Nagging at her were deep questions about her life, about how to force herself to stop, about Allah and His Decree. She could not resolve these questions so she settled at making tawbah and swearing that this time would be the last.


And a new cycle would begin.

She was angry because she felt that she had dutifully followed the “practicing Muslim blueprint” that involved memorizing the Qur’an, seeking sacred knowledge, busying herself with prayer, giving dawah, and yet she had become addicted to pornography and acting out.

She felt she was following every single thing she knew of or she heard in the Islamic lectures she attended that talked about tempering one’s sexual and carnal desires to remedy her struggles with pornography and it was not working.

“I avidly researched the Islamic cures for sexual desire. I tried fasting, lowering my gaze, disconnecting the internet at home. I made Hajj. Hanging with my whole body at the Multazam of the Ka’ba, I wept and begged Allah from the depths of my heart to cure me of my spiritual disease and make it so I never went back; so that it was as if all of it had never happened. Six months later, I relapsed again...

What was perhaps worse than the relapse was the meaning I attached to it: that Allah had not answered my prayer, that He had abandoned me, that He would never make the nightmare end. In retrospect, I think this was actually the most detrimental aspect of the whole ordeal: I couldn’t make sense of why Allah was “doing this to me”.

--- Sister Fatima
There are many Muslims like sister Fatima struggling with pornography and other unwanted sexual behaviors who love Islam and want to be dutiful servants to Allah.

Grounded in an Islamic world-view they naturally want to seek out a solution to their struggles from within the sacred texts themselves.

Because they feel embarrassed by their secret struggles and do not want to confide in another person who can directly assist them, they turn to Islamic websites, or lectures that address sexual purity or maintaining modesty in faith.

The only problem is that the majority of the literature available is on the topic of sexual desires, which is very different from compulsive sexual behaviors and addictions.

In Wrong Advice Good Intentions, I will evaluate five of the most common pieces of Islamic advice that Muslims struggling with unwanted sexual behaviors will attempt as cures and why in the context of an addiction this advice can actually be damaging.

If you are currently struggling with an addiction to pornography or other sexual behaviors, you will develop a better appreciation as to how you can actually incorporate Islam on your journey to change.

Make no mistake about it. Islam holds the keys to guiding you to be able to break free from haram behaviors, and my work with Muslims from around the world is all grounded within the Islamic framework.

The reality is that there may be different parts of Islam, from hadith to statements of scholars, that are meant to guide you on the path to change that differ from the commonly cited examples that follow.

In sha Allah this allows for you to cultivate a relationship with the Most-High on this path to recovery.
Here Are The Five Most Common Pieces Of Islamic Advice To Muslims Struggling With Pornography And Or Other Sexual Behaviors

1. Lower Your Gaze
   The Qur’an specifically instructs believing men and women in Surah Al-Nur to lower your gaze as a means to protect your chastity. If you are sexually aroused you should just lower your gaze and not look.

2. Increase In Fasting
   The Prophet Muhammad PBUH advised fasting as a way to temper your sexual desires so you should increase in fasting.

3. Go Get Married
   Marriage is a halal place for you to be intimate with your spouse and for you to fulfill your sexual desires. The problem is that you are still single, so you need to take the means to get married to protect your chastity and keep you from sexual sin.

4. Move To A Muslim Land
   You should move to a Muslim land where people are modestly dressed and there is no sexual promiscuity out in the open. A pure environment will help keep you pure.

5. Keep Yourself Busy
   If you keep yourself busy with things that will benefit you in both religious and worldly terms such as memorizing the book of Allah, attending circles of knowledge, you will not relapse and fall back into things that waste your time.
FACTS ON LOWERING THE GAZE

With regards to the advice of lowering the gaze to an individual who has an addiction to looking or viewing sexual material, it’s like trying to tell an alcoholic that the substance they are drinking is harmful and that they should replace it with drinking juice instead.

We all accept for an alcoholic that they can’t stop drinking by substituting what they drink. The problem is much deeper and more complicated than the drink itself.

It may be new or different for us to view someone’s compulsive sexual behaviors with the same lens as an alcoholic but this is the reality. A sexual compulsion is different from the natural tendency to experience desire for the opposite gender.

While some may lower their gaze and move on, an individual with a sexual addiction will find even with their lower gaze their mind recreating the sexual image over and over again.

In fact, their brain has been trained to sexualize almost anyone and anything!

FACTS ON FASTING

Ibn Mas’ood said that he and others were there when the Prophet, , said: “O young people, whoever of you can afford marriage should marry because it is more (conducive to) lowering the gaze and more protective of the private parts; and whoever is not able to marry should fast, because fasting diminishes his sexual desire.” [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

The rationale is if I fast continuously then my sexual desires should diminish or disappear.

Most of the individuals whom I work with have reported that fasting aided them in staying away from unwanted sexual outlets during the day time but after they break their fast they will return to the same behaviors at night.

On a more extreme level, this past Ramadan eighty individuals personally emailed me saying that they could not even make it through fasting for the whole day and they broke their fasts during Ramadan while sexually acting out.
FACTS ON MARRIAGE
The common myth is that Muslims seek out pornography, masturbate and engage in sexual activity with others because they are forbidden to date and have no way to let out their desires. Marriage is advised as the solution that provides a halal outlet.

If marriage was a solution on its own, there would be very few married Muslims that make up the members of Purify Your Gaze. We have as many married men and women seeking help for their addictions as we do singles.

Marriage does help one guard their chastity if they are not struggling with an addictive personality that is drawn to sexual behaviors. An individual may start out with marriage and be satisfied in the very beginning of their marriage with their spouse, but typically a few months in their marriage they found themselves back again. Unfortunately, the marriage solution not only fails, but it also destroys marriages and families.

FACTS ON MOVING TO MUSLIM LANDS
Individuals are told they need to leave the West where sexual immorality is rampant and living in a Muslim land where modesty is practiced would help protect them.

There is definite truth to the argument that a pure environment has a positive effect on one’s well being but this is not the reality today even in the Muslim lands.

Privately the Muslim lands are amongst the highest consumers of online pornography.

A Google trends report for the keywords of sex pulled up Pakistan, Vietnam, India, Egypt, Indonesia, Morocco, Malaysia, Turkey, Poland, Greece.

Of the top 10 countries listed, 6 countries with a predominantly Muslim majority were listed.

FACTS ON KEEPING YOURSELF BUSY
One client that I worked with tried to follow this advice and he occupied himself with as many Islamic activities that he could.

The rationale, being alone usually leads to relapse so why not fill the time completely so there isn’t a chance to go back?

The irony is despite literally filling up his schedule with various activities, he would increasingly find himself relapsing back to his unwanted sexual behaviors.

The reason why is that his busy schedule was just another form of escape from facing the problems that arose in his life like his seeking out of pornography was.

Structuring meaning into your life and purpose is different from structuring added forms of escape. Besides, I asked him is a sustainable solution really to avoid alone time altogether?
GOOD SOUNDED ADVICE IS NOT ALWAYS THE COMPLETE ADVICE

While all of these common advices are great acts of worship in of themselves and for the general populace may offer sound advice on how to protect one’s sexual chastity, the timing of the advice is not suitable to an individual who is addicted to pornography or other sexual behaviors.

What I teach and advocate at Purify Your Gaze is that you cannot stop your unwanted sexual behaviors and stay stopped unless you pause and look at why you really are turning to these sexual outlets.

And when you do, you will begin to notice that it has very little to do with sex at all.

It is not out of a physical or biological drive for sex but because of psychological, emotional and spiritual ailments that have nothing to do with sex at all.

This is true with all addictions: the real root of the problem is never with the “drug or behavior” that one has lost control to - be it pornography, work, food, alcohol, or drugs.

So in clear and plain language the problem is not with pornography or the ever-present sexual imagery all around us.

Sex is but a substituted vehicle or medium through which you are trying to meet your psychospiritual voids.

After Sister Fatima began her journey to healing through Purify Your Gaze she had the following reflection:

“For years, I had focused all of my energies on stopping the behaviors. I never, not once, considered it was just pointing to deeper wounds, hurt and confusion that I didn’t know existed. But as I discovered, it wasn’t really about sexual desire gone out of control. What triggered my relapse were not usually sexual triggers – 90% of the time they were psychological and emotional triggers. I was using pornography as a means of escape, rooted in an inability to manage my challenges and stresses in life. It was a coping mechanism I used to numb out the pain, to escape, to avoid, to run away. A quick-fix antidote of pleasure that just made all my problems disappear for a little while.”

Embracing the reality that her struggles with pornography were not simply one of sexual desire but were rooted in psychospiritual challenges allowed Sister Fatima to make real progress.

To create permanent change, we’ve got to look sincerely and honestly within ourselves deep below the surface. So long as you try engaging just the symptoms but not the root problems you will only end up with surface level experiences.

By embracing this paradigm shift, you too in shaa Allah can let go of a narrow focused for solutions and open your heart and what troubles it at its core to be touched most deeply by the light of guidance.