

Atiya Husain

Sexuality khutba outline

a. رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي وَاخْلُ عُنْدَ مِنْ لِسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

- b. *My Lord! relieve my mind. And ease my task for me. And remove the impediment from my speech so that they may comprehend what I am saying:*

إِنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا، مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يُضِلَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ. وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

Indeed, all praise is for Allah. We praise Him, we ask for His help, we beg for His forgiveness, and we seek refuge and protection with Allah from the evils of ourselves and from the evil consequences of our sins. Whoever Allah [SWT] guides to the straight path, no force in the universe can misguide him. And whoever Allah [SWT] misguides, no one can guide them to the Truth. I bear witness that there is no deity, no object worthy of any act of worship except Allah [SWT], the One without any partners, associates or equals. And I bear witness that Muhammad [SAWS] is His slave and messenger.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ
(3:102)

O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except as Muslims.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا
(4:1)

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person, and from him He created his wife, and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual rights, and do not cut the relations of kinship. Surely, Allah is an All-Watcher over you.

(1)

Today's khutbah topic will focus on themes of sexuality and related issues but before I begin I want to start with something that is important to all of us no matter how we individually define sexuality. I want to start with Al-Qalb, or the heart. Our hearts literally and metaphorically are truly powerful parts of us and sum up in many ways who we are. In Bukhari and Muslim, it is reported that the Prophet s.a.w. said "...In the body, there is a piece of flesh, if it is good, the whole body is good, and if it is bad, the whole body is bad; truly it is the heart."

In the Qur'an, hearts are spoken of in all kinds of ways. It is as though they have lives of their own. They have sensory abilities – they can see and hear. They can apprehend or understand things. They can be opened and they can be sealed. Hearts can be doubtful and hearts can be certain. Hearts can be diseased, too, which means that hearts can be healthy. Adding to this, muslim scholars have talked about hearts in similar ways...describing them further as either dead or alive, hard or soft, rusted or not. With all that hearts are and all that they can do, it is not hard to imagine ourselves as reducible to the state of our hearts. In fact, that's exactly what Imam Muslim reports the Prophet s.a.w. as saying. He said, "Allah does not look at your bodies, nor does He look at your images, but He looks into your hearts."

So how are our hearts doing? Hearts are funny things because we can't just ask them about their status. You can't just ask your heart if it's clean, if it's seeing and hearing things that make it more beautiful, or whether or not it's healthy. You can feed it a steady diet of dhikr, since it says in the Quran in surah Al-Ra3d :

13:28

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الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ
تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾

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Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah .

Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."

But dhikr is a treatment. While it is important to know the remedies like dhikr, it is also important to reflect on where the diseases of the heart are formed to begin with.

In truth, everything we do has some interaction with our hearts. As humans, our minds and our hearts do not operate separately, but together, and influence one another. For example, when we love someone, we may find that our minds make excuses for them. We make excuses for their mistakes, their shortcomings, even when they've hurt us, and so on.

Still worse – it can be hard to see that a person is human when we don't like something about them. In today's khutba, the main take away – the essential thing I'm encouraging you to do – is to think with your heart when it comes to matters of sexuality and gender in our communities. Thinking with your heart is essentially empathy. We've all heard the word empathy thrown around so it's easy to dismiss it as empty, but if you think about it, empathy is an Islamically deep and rich concept. Because if empathy is thinking with your heart – where the heart is a microcosm of our very selves as described in the Quran and Sunnah - our ability and

willingness to empathize is reflective of the state our hearts and of who we are as Muslim individuals and communities.

(2)

Our ability to empathize can be a way to improve the health of our hearts, which is what we are ultimately judged by before God. But that's not the kind of judgment that I will focus on today. Instead I will focus on the judgment we have of each other. It is a myopic and incomplete judgment, as most human-on-human judgments are, and it has serious consequences for our communities and our individual hearts.

The story I am about to tell is an intense one. I am warning you that it is a tragic story, and trigger warnings of various sorts apply. I push on however because I firmly believe it is telling of larger issues that for far too long have gone inadequately addressed.

This story was reported in national media outlets in November of last year. In Chicago, a 19 year old Pakistani American Muslim girl gave birth to a 7lb 12oz baby in her bedroom. She shared this bedroom with her sister in an 8th floor apartment that she lived in with her family. She had hidden her pregnancy from her family and received no prenatal care. Only her boyfriend and a close friend knew of her pregnancy. It was reported that she gave birth alone in the room she shared with her 10 year old sister...while her younger sister was asleep. When she heard her mother approaching the door of the room, she dropped the baby out of the window. It is unclear if it was intentional or if it was an accident. Someone else found the baby outside and called 911. The baby died in the hospital soon after that. When police investigated, she admitted to what

happened and is now being charged with murder. Her parents are now standing by her as she goes through the legal system.

When I first read this story, I was deeply disturbed, as I'm sure many of you are now. I was disturbed by the loss of life, by the lengths she felt she needed to go to in that split second. I was disturbed by the fact that she went through the process of giving birth, alone. I was disturbed by what sort of physical and emotional pain I imagine she was going through such that her actions made sense to her at the time. People are usually trying their best to do what makes sense to them, and she is no exception. Some features of her life suggest that she had her reasons for what she did. It is because of these reasons that we are talking about her story today. They even might sound familiar. She had a scholarship to a local university and was struggling with depression. Already, that describes some of us. A letter of support from one of the girl's friends says: "Sometimes she felt under pressure to be this perfect daughter...even pressure to be this perfect Muslim woman that prayed, fasted, was humble and also didn't make mistakes." Her parents did not approve of her boyfriend – who, notably, is African American. Her boyfriend's mother is quoted as saying, "With all her family has put her through, I'm surprised she didn't jump out of the window herself."

Some features of the girl's story are familiar to some of us and/or to people we know: depression, anxiety, struggling to live up to religious and social expectations, particularly expectations of Muslim women, anti-black racism coming from non-black Muslims, the struggle to express sexuality in healthy and safe ways, and a troubled relationship with parents and family. We must note that oppression based on gender and sexuality does not only occur in extreme situations like this one. This story reflects larger issues and for us to distance ourselves

from complicity with statements like “well I would never do that” only perpetuate the seemingly little and everyday ideas and practices that work to support big problems like this one.

These are common struggles in our community. They are also largely silent struggles even though they are so common. When we do talk about them, we are often abstract and fearful of the messiness that they create, offering surface level condemnations. But life is messy. Sexuality is particularly messy since as it brings up questions of gender, halal/haram, social norms, family, the body, and, of course, the heart. We treat questions of halal and haram as particularly salient in matters of sexuality, but for some reason become less enthusiastic about what is halal and haram in other matters. We must remember that many of us are struggling, and that sexuality is one particular focus of this struggle. When I say sexuality, I’m talking about all of us – whether our struggles are finding a partner, staying with a partner, leaving a partner, negotiating our sexual identity, and so on. Sexuality is a fundamental part of who we are as humans, and like other aspects of our lives such as education, social life...its a test. I believe that part of this test relates to privilege. When we are members of a dominant group – so for example, if someone was straight, or male, or white, or wealthy, or Christian – it is our responsibility to not use our position in society to oppress others. For those of us who are heterosexual or fit a more common and acceptable image of who Muslims are supposed to be in our community, our privilege is perhaps a test in and of itself. A test that muddies our ability to recognize abuse and oppression unless we try hard to see it. A test that may be to determine if we truly create inclusive spaces in our community. A test that may be to push past the arrogance that can develop when we believe that only we are right. And the failure to rise to the challenge of these tests pushes hordes of Muslims out of the community. Would we be able to stand before God

having failed such a test? Hurting whole communities when many of us believe that the prophet s.a.w is reported to have said that there is no veil between the oppressed and Allah SWT? We must be kinder to each other and take care of each other better knowing this.

(break)

Aqulu Qawli hadha wastaghfirullah li wa lakum Wa lisaairil muslimina fastaghfiruhu Innahu huwal Ghafurur Rahim.

“AlHamdulillah was Salatu Wassalamu ‘ala Rasulullah”

(break)

Like I said earlier in the khutba, our minds and hearts are connected. And everything we take in has some impact on our hearts. Given this, we need to change the ways we think about sexuality. The Islamic faith tradition pays lots of attention to sexuality in terms of legality or halal/haram but that is not the subject I am here to address today. What I am here to address is the disappointing ways we treat our LGBTQI Muslim sisters and brothers, even given that various sects of Islam agree that to be LGBTQI does not remove one from the fold of Islam.

It is of the prophetic tradition that one of the things that warms people’s hearts is when space is made for them to enter a gathering. That’s usually taken to mean making a literal space for them to sit and also a metaphorical one. If we approach our fellow Muslims from a position of love, we would make space for them. The Prophet s.a.w. treated Muslims and non-Muslims with respect and kindness. He had strong relationships with people of other faith traditions. He allowed Christians to pray in a masjid. He stood up in respect for the funeral of a Jewish person who was passing by him. If the prophet treated people like this with respect – people who were

not Muslim – why can't we treat fellow Muslims who are LGBTQI with respect and kindness? Our fellow Muslims' gender identity and or sexual orientation does not absolve Muslims from adhering to *Adaab al-islam*, to our manners, and our conceptions of respecting human dignity.

Matters of the heart reemerge here. Many of us are all too familiar with what it feels to have our heart broken. Recognizing this shared understanding of pain I ask, would you or do you repeatedly subject yourself to a community that breaks your heart? To a community that says "love the sinner hate the sin" but still can't seem to find love for you once your gender and/or sexual identity becomes known?

The use of such a phrase is commonly seen as a tolerant way to talk about *lgbtqi* people in religious communities.

Put yourself in the place of a person who is told that there is no *halal* way to fulfill their sexual desires...if that's not already a reality for some of you here. Forget putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Put your heart in another person's rib cage. Learn to empathize. Learn that sayings like "love the sinner hate the sin" still ignores a person's humanity because at the end of the day that aphorism is only applied to some people and some issues while particularly ignoring others. That is to say, if we said "love the sinner hate the sin" across the board, with equal frequency for each thing that most Muslims consider a sin in Islam, it might be different. But that's not what we do. We do not go well out of our way to say "love the sinner hate the sin" about domestic abuse, do we? Why then do we say it about matters of sexuality?

Singling out some and not others dehumanizes those who are singled out and is undeniably a form of marginalization.

We have **not** been taught to hate the ill treatment of orphans as much as we have been taught to hate women who will not allow their bodies to be policed all the time. We have **not** been taught to hate excess, extravagance, INTEREST, and the hoarding of wealth as much as we have been taught to hate sexual difference.

When we name some things as sins and not others, and when we focus on policing some sins and not others, we send messages to people about what we will and will not tolerate in our communities...who we do and do not value in our communities. For some of our communities to be more openly willing to tolerate violence against women more easily than to tolerate consensual relations behind closed doors is truly ugly. I challenge all of us, including myself, to be critical of our priorities and to encourage us to be more open to recognizing and appreciating one another's humanity.

Ending dua:

May allah ease the pain and suffering of the man who was severely burned at Dey hall during the power outage two weeks ago

May Allah protect us all from being hurt and from hurting one another. May Allah guide us toward what is best for us. May we come up with ways to manage our realities today. May we stop judging one another and remember that allah swt is the best of judges. May we show one

another kindness and generosity. May we understand sexuality for the the multi-faceted, complex, personal and individual reality that it is. Allah, bless the women and girls who are called “bad” and looked down upon and disrespected. Bless the women and girls who are called “good” and put on a pedestal, struggling under pressure to perform. Give peace to the ones who cannot stay in Muslim communities, and give peace to the ones who cannot leave Muslim communities. Give calm to the ones who do what they need to do to survive. Give healing to the ones who feel broken, and remind us that You love and understand us. Give understanding to those who feel misunderstood. Give us knowledge of our own hearts. Give us the strength to sit with complexity. Give us peace of mind and clean hearts. Give us a strong sense of self. Give us the strength to believe that we are as valuable as You say we are, especially when we don’t see that reflected in how others treat us.

Allah swt protect us. Shield us when we lose the ability to do so ourselves. Grant us success in our ways and justice in the spaces we inhabit. Line our perceptions with an iron honesty and guard our conclusions from the inebriation of laziness and the rashness of our egos. Give us patience. Patience and the wisdom to know when we no longer owe it.