



The Dangers of Mixed Gatherings: Insights from the Qur'ān and Sunnah

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The free mixing, meeting together, intermingling of men and women in one place, the crowding of them together, and the revealing and exposure of women to men are completely prohibited by the Sharī'ah. These acts are prohibited because they are among the causes for *Fitnah* (temptation or trial which implies evil consequences) and the committing of indecency and wrongdoing. It is, therefore, necessary to present the true teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunnah on this matter. Although this topic demands thorough discussion due to the overwhelming evidences against such practices, but in this article, I will summarise the key points.

Mixed gatherings have become a prevalent issue in contemporary society, particularly in the context of weddings. Social norms have shifted to the extent that our weddings are often deemed incomplete without free mixing and accompanying music played in the background throughout the wedding. Music often plays throughout the event and is briefly paused for the *Imām* to conduct the *Nikāḥ* ceremony and *Du'ā'*, only to resume immediately afterward! How can such a practice align with Islamic principles, and how can one expect any *Barakah* (blessing) in a wedding conducted this way?

It is unfortunate that many individuals these days attempt to justify the permissibility of mixed gatherings, particularly when it comes to weddings. What answer will we have before Allāh ﷻ on the Day of Judgment? How will we bear the shame of facing our beloved Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ while having ignored his teachings?

Regrettably, mixed gatherings, especially at weddings, have become normalised within many communities. Those who choose to adhere to gender-segregated arrangements are often viewed as overly conservative. This represents a significant departure from Islamic teachings, which emphasise the sanctity and purity of social interactions.

Such gatherings frequently pave the way for inappropriate behavior. The Prophet ﷺ stressed the importance of avoiding practices that might harm both individuals and the community. Islam seeks to eliminate potential sources of corruption by promoting peace and harmonious relationships. Unregulated interaction between men and women is discouraged to prevent undesirable impulses and moral decline.

Moreover, mixed gatherings create conditions where social and moral boundaries are easily transgressed. They cater for an environment conducive to the spread of societal ills, which often go unrecognised until their consequences become evident. This silent *Fitnah* can lead to broken trust, family conflicts, and damaged relationships. Upholding modesty serves as a safeguard for the health and stability of families and communities.

The guidelines that govern interactions between men and women are essential for maintaining a stable society. When these guidelines are ignored, it can lead to the downfall of entire communities, as observed at various points throughout history. To safeguard against this, Allāh ﷻ has set clear boundaries in the Holy Qur'ān. For example, both men and women are instructed to lower their gazes, women are advised not to speak in a soft tone when speaking to men, and the Ṣaḥābah (RA) were directed to speak to women from behind a curtain when needed.

The Holy Qur'ān provides explicit guidance on maintaining separation between men and women and upholding modesty. Allāh ﷻ states:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allāh is Acquainted with what they do." (Sūrah An-Nūr, 24:30)

In the very next verse, Allāh ﷻ says:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof." (Sūrah An-Nūr, 24:31)

Furthermore, the Qur'ān highlights the appropriate nature of interaction between men and the wives of the Prophet ﷺ:

وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ

"And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts." (Sūrah Al-Aḥzāb, 33:53)

Imām al-Qurṭubī states that this verse serves as evidence that when it was necessary to seek guidance or ask questions from the wives of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, including for religious guidance, it had to be done from behind a curtain (*Hijāb*). This directive applies to all Muslim women. Furthermore, other principles of Islamic teachings emphasise that a woman's dignity is upheld by her modesty, which includes covering her body and maintaining a reserved voice.

These verses highlight the importance of maintaining boundaries and upholding modesty in interactions between non-*Maḥram* men and women. The Qur'ān explicitly instructs both men and women to lower their gazes. However, how can this command be fulfilled when gatherings are mixed, and free interaction is normalised at weddings and social events?

The *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ further reinforces these principles and highlights the gravity of free interaction between men and women. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd (RA) narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said:

الإثم حواز القلوب، وما من نظرة إلا وللشيطان فيها مطمع

"The sins sway the hearts; and Satan has high hopes of the eye which is raised to look at a non-Maḥram." (al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr: 9/149)

In a *Ḥadīth al-Qudsi*, the Prophet ﷺ narrated that Allāh ﷻ said:

النظرة سهم مسموم من سهام إبليس من تركها من مخافتي أبدلته إيماناً يجد حلاوته في قلبه

"Gazing at a non-Maḥram is one of the poisoned arrows of Satan. Whosoever leaves it out of fear for Me, I will bless him with such Imān, the sweetness of which he will feel in his heart."

(al-Mustadrak, 4/349 and al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr, 10/173)

If it is not permissible to gaze at non-*Maḥram* women, how can it be justified to attend mixed gatherings or weddings where men and women are seated together? This practice goes against the clear teachings of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*.

Furthermore, guarding the gaze is not just a precaution but a continuous good deed. The Prophet ﷺ said:

ثلاثة لا ترى أعينهم النار : عين حرس في سبيل الله ، وعين بكت من خشية الله ، وعين كفت عن محارم الله

"There are three kinds of men whose eyes will not see the hellfire: the eye which looks out for the enemy while in the path of Allāh; the eye which cries out of fear of Allāh; and the eye which lowers its gaze from what Allāh has forbidden." (al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr, 19/416)

Protecting one's gaze is of utmost importance, as failing to do so can lead to committing major sins. A sin as grave as adultery can often begin with something as seemingly innocent as a simple glance. The renowned Egyptian poet, Aḥmad Shawqi, expressed this progression in his poem:

نظرة فابتسامة فسلام فكلام فموعد فلقاء

"A glance, then a smile, then a greeting; followed by conversation, an appointment, and eventually a meeting."

Lowering the gaze brings numerous benefits to a believer. It helps to keep the heart pure and free from corruption, shielding it from regret and the negative consequences of unchecked desires. Additionally, one's heart is illuminated with divine light (*Nūr*), leading to contentment and inner peace. This practice also serves as a safeguard against immoralities and impure desires, sharpening the mind and enhancing focus. Moreover, lowering the gaze brings one closer to Allāh ﷻ, earning His love and pleasure. It serves as a protection from the fire of Hell and grants the individual the honor of becoming a true inheritor of the religion.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ upheld strict measures to ensure separation between men and women, even in sacred places like the mosque to emphasise the importance of maintaining boundaries. This separation was achieved by designating different rows for men and women, instructing men to remain in the mosque after completing obligatory prayers so that women could leave first, and assigning a separate entrance for women. This practice is supported by the narration of Umm Salamah (RA):

أَنَّ أُمَّ سَلَمَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا - قَالَتْ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِذَا سَلَّمَ قَامَ النِّسَاءُ حِينَ يَقْضِي تَسْلِيمَهُ، وَمَكَثَ يَسِيرًا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَقُومَ. قَالَ ابْنُ شِهَابٍ فَأَرَى - وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ - أَنَّ مُكْتَهُ لِكَيْ يَنْفَذَ النِّسَاءُ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُدْرِكَهُنَّ مَنِ انْصَرَفَ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ.

Narrated Umm Salamah: Whenever Allāh's Messenger ﷺ finished his prayers with Taslīm [saying As-Salāmu 'Alaikum to conclude the Ṣalāh], the women would get up and he would stay on for a while in his place before getting up. Ibn Shihāb said: "I think (and Allāh knows better), that the purpose of his stay was that the women might leave before the men who had finished their prayer." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī: 837)

If such procedures were required in the mosque—a place dedicated to worship and far removed from sources of temptation or desire—then similar or even stricter measures should be implemented in other settings.

In another narration, Abū Usayd (RA) heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say when he was coming out of the mosque, and men and women were mingled in the road: *"Draw back, for you must not walk in the middle of the road; keep to the sides of the road."* Then women were keeping so close to the wall that their garments were rubbing against it. (Sunan Abī Dāwūd 5272)

While mixed interactions in places like markets, hospitals, educational institutions *and other essentials of life* are sometimes unavoidable, deliberate efforts should be made to avoid and minimise such situations. In fact, when it comes to markets, they are the most disliked of all places.

The Prophet ﷺ states in a Ḥadīth:

أَحَبُّ الْبِلَادِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَسَاجِدُهَا وَأَبْغَضُ الْبِلَادِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَسْوَاقُهَا

"The parts of land dearest to Allāh are its mosques, and the parts most hateful to Allāh are markets." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 671)

According to this Ḥadīth, the most beloved of all places to Allāh ﷻ are the Mosques and most disliked are the markets due to the fact that there are *Fitan* (temptations) present. Therefore, visits to such places should be minimised whenever possible, and one should be mindful to control their gaze.

The distinction between *Ḍarūrat* (necessity) and *Majbūri* (compulsion) lies in the need and lack of alternatives, while *Ikhtiyār* (choice) and non-*Ikhtiyār* (lack of choice) relate to whether the situation is within our control. For places visited out of necessity, such as markets or hospitals, it is permissible provided one safeguards their *Imān* by controlling their gaze and maintaining modesty. However, for non-essential gatherings, efforts should be made to ensure proper segregation and avoid situations that could compromise one's *Imān*.

However, in settings where the free mixing of men and women can be controlled, such as weddings, family events, and gatherings involving non-*Maḥrams*, separation must be managed effectively by designating specific areas for men and women and, where feasible, providing separate entrances.

The issue of mixed gatherings is not limited to public or social events; it also extends into the realm of family interactions within the home or family gatherings. People living in the same home often become so accustomed to each other that the rules of *Sharī'ah* regarding *Hijāb* and interactions are overlooked. It is commonly observed that *Hijāb* is not practiced with relatives or brothers-in-law, despite the strong emphasis on maintaining *Hijāb* in such situations. 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir (RA) narrates that the Prophet ﷺ said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالذُّخُولَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ فَقَالَ رَجُلٌ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَرَأَيْتَ الْحَمُو؟ قَالَ: الْحَمُو الْمَوْتُ

"Do not go near non-Maḥram women." A man asked: "O Messenger of Allāh, what about the in-laws [husband's brother]?" The Prophet ﷺ responded: "The [dangers in not observing Hijāb with] in-laws are like death." (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 5232)

This Ḥadīth clearly indicates that the Prophet ﷺ also commanded women to maintain segregation from relatives, specifically brothers-in-law. The assumption that it is permissible for relatives and in-laws to gather without observing the boundaries of *Hijāb* and segregation is not supported by Islamic teachings. This misconception contributes to the normalisation of mixed gatherings within extended families, where interactions that should be governed by the principles of modesty are often overlooked. Such practices can erode the protective guidelines set forth by Islam, which are designed to preserve the sanctity and stability of familial and social structures.

It is therefore imperative that we recognise mixed gatherings as a significant source of social and moral decay. Such practices provide fertile ground for the proliferation of social ills, often without the awareness that mixing is at the root. Mixing is a primary contributor to a subtle yet pervasive *Fitnah*, resulting in betrayal, broken homes, and emotional distress.

May Allāh ﷻ grant us the wisdom to adhere to Islamic teachings and protect the integrity of our social interactions. *Āmīn*. For a deeper understanding of this topic, please refer to the books mentioned in the references.

References: al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr (Ṭabarānī), al-Mustadrak (Ḥākim), Hijāb: The Islamic Commandments of Hijāb (Dr. Mohammad Ismail Memon Madani), 100 ways to enter *Jannah* (Dr. Shabbir Ahmed)