

## MODULE 2

**Class Title:** Gender Relations – Part 3 (3<sup>rd</sup> part of a 3 lesson series)

**Aim of Lesson:** To learn Islamic etiquettes of gender interaction

**Category:** Interpersonal Relations

**Class Format:** Power point presentation with narration.

**(Greeting to students)** *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

*(Ta'awwuz) A'oodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

*(Du'a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli (Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)*

Slide 1:

For the last two classes we have been talking about gender relations.

We have been talking about the relationship between a male and a female and we looked at various different scenarios. We talked about who our *mehram* relatives are and we can be totally cool and chill with them, no issues. Then we talked about all the significant others in our lives, who are a very important part of our lives and here we need to apply certain conditions; certain checks and boundaries in our relationship with them.

*Alhamdulillah* in that context we talked about our cousins and who else?

Students: our class mates and our teachers.

Slide 2 & 3:

Teacher: Yes. There is another very important category of people who are significant others in our lives: the people who work for your parents.

They don't work for you right, they work for your parents. I personally feel that "servant" in itself is a very derogatory term, but we are used to it as we ourselves are servants of Allah (swt) right? People, like your household staff, that's a better word, cooks, drivers, gardeners, etc. People who are significant part of your life because you see them all the time. You probably spend more time with them and they are around you more than your relatives perhaps. How many of you have got people working for your parents who are there most of the time? I'm talking about men right now? Ok. *Alhamdulillah*, majority of you do.

A lot of times what happens is that we think that people who are working in our homes, whether they are men or women, they don't exist. Seriously! Sometimes we pretend as if good fairies come in and do all our work and no human being has got anything to do with it. People who work for your parents are very much human beings, and they **have** a gender. They are **not** sort of benign. You know what I mean; they are not genderless. We pretend that they don't exist; we are talking, the driver is driving, your friend is sitting at the back or you're with your mom or cousin or sister whatever, you go on yap yapping, of course in

English! thinking that this person who is sitting in the car sitting right in front, driving has no clue.

You think he is a dummy, *naudhubillah* and has no clue what is going on! You are living your life, parallel to the life of a person who is in very close proximity with you, all the time. I don't mean it in a physical sense, I mean like around all the time and that is very problematic and tragic. They are very much part of your lives and very significant to you at that given point in time. Ok, so you need to have a decent way of dealing with them. In what kind of manner do you think you should deal with them?

You need to have a very clear cut relationship with the people who work for your parents. Very clear cut means: extremely formal, very polite and very reserved. Please can you repeat after me? Very formal, very polite, very reserved.

If somebody is older than you, don't expect them to call you *baji* (madam). You are not their *baji*. **You** call them so and so *bhai* (brother), or whatever; because it means a lot to them, be respectful when you address them. Be very respectful. It is not your place to reprimand them in any way. Do they work for you?

Student: no.

Teacher: no. So you have a driver who comes late to pick you up from school. What are you going to do? Bang the door when you sit in the car and shout angrily, "Do you know what time it is? Is this the time to pick me?" Is this the way you are going to behave with him?

Students: no.

Teacher: he is older than you. He's a human being. He doesn't work for you. Various reasons right? Utmost respect, yet there is no need to be friends with the cook or the gardener or the driver etc.

There is no need for that. Yes, if you have a woman cook, woman driver, and a woman whatever, most certainly be friends with her. But with a man there is no need for that. Absolutely not.

If you have male staff in your home there is no business that they should come in your own space. For example, coming to your room; bringing a cup of tea to your room. Absolutely not! Even if that is the norm in your house, please make sure that that doesn't happen. They are your non-*mehrams*.

Student: but what if they come to clean the room?

Teacher: don't be there if it's like that. If you have a man who cleans your house, you should not be sitting in the room while he is cleaning because he is not your *mahram*. If you have that issue that you have a male servant in the house, then make sure that it doesn't happen.

Pardon my saying this if that happens in your home, but I find it appalling and scandalizing. How can grown people be walking around in homes bringing bed tea to *baji* (madam) and *sahab* (master). Who are they? They are non-*mehrams*.

Do you understand what I'm saying here? It may sound very crude but that is what it is. You need to have a very clear boundary over here. Even if that is the practice in your home. Perhaps you need to go home and talk to your parents in a very very polite manner that you're not comfortable with having a man coming in your room. When he is cleaning up, don't be there; simple as that and that is a very do-able thing. What do you do, sit up if somebody is doing *jharu* (brooming) and even then what are you doing perched up on a chair with your feet on the seat? Or sitting up on your bed or something. When somebody is cleaning you need to be out of there. I don't have a cleaning-man but even when my cleaning-lady cleans up I'm not in the room because I don't want to sit with my feet up and have her clean around me! You don't want to do that. Therefore it's best that you avoid being there for that period of time.

But also very important, to keep a distance and have lots of respect for them. Distance and respect.

There a few thumb rules of interaction we must remember *InshaAllah*.

- ✓ Cousins are not brothers or buddies.
- ✓ Class mates, colleagues are not buddies, best friends or close friends.
- ✓ Servants are not invisible or genderless.
- ✓ And fiancés are not your *mahrams*.

Very important. Is anybody engaged here? Why are you laughing? That is not funny at all you know how old are you girls?

Students: thirteen, fourteen

Teacher: thirteen, fourteen. Well it could be possible few years down the line maybe, I don't know but that is something you must understand. There is no such thing as a *mangni* or engagement in our *deen*. That is no relationship. That person does not become a *mehram*. That kind of thing doesn't exist really here.

Student: correct that if somebody brings a *rishta* (proposal for marriage) are they allowed to look at you without *hijab*?

Teacher: that's right. When they bring a *rishta* they are supposed to look at you without the *hijab* meaning with your face open, not your scarf completely off!

Just to clarify this matter of engagement: when somebody comes for a *rishta* it is recommended that they should actually see the person that they are marrying. Our *deen* is not ridiculous, such that one would be expected to marry another without even seeing the other. That's crazy, even for somebody who covers completely. One who covers the face must also show her face; she must show herself to the person and by showing herself doesn't mean that she should just completely throw off her scarf.

They can meet with a chaperone; there must be someone there with them, they cannot meet alone. They can talk to each other like normal human beings.

Speaking of women talking to men, it is important that Muslim women and girls are not giggly and stupid. If somebody talks to them they must be composed and mature.

Do you know about Mariam (as)? Do you know who she was? She was incredible! She was the mother of ‘Isa (as). She was a virgin; She was not married and Allah (swt), as a special miracle blessed her with ‘Isa (as) in her womb. She was a very spiritual person; she would sit in seclusion and pray to Allah (swt). She was very young at that time, probably fourteen, fifteen years old.

Maryam (as) was a very confident young woman. She had a huge amount of *haya*, which is **not** shame – but modesty. When we translate the word *haya* into shame it takes on a very strange and warped kind of connotation.

So she was full of *haya*, she was full of *taqwa* (god consciousness) of Allah (swt). and Jibril (as). Do you know who Jibril (as) is?

Students: yes

Student: a messenger who brought Allah's (swt) revelations to the Prophet (pbuh).

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah* and the messenger who brought revelations to all the prophets. Right? So he is very special angel of Allah (swt), Jibril (as). So he came in the guise of a man in front of Maryam (as) and what did she do? Did she lose her composure because there was a man in her room? Did she giggle and act stupid? You know she was about thirteen, fourteen years old and a virgin; completely isolated from people. Is that what she did? No. She was absolutely confident and behaved with much poise; this is stated in Surah Maryam 19: Verses 16 – 20.

And mention in the Book (the Qur’an), O Muhammad pbuh, The story of) Maryam (Mary), when she withdrew in seclusion from her family to a place facing east.

She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her our *Ruh* (angel Jibril), and he appeared before her in the form of a man in all respects.

She said, “Verily, I seek refuge with the Most Gracious (Allah) from you, if you do fear Allah.”

(The angel) said, “I am only a messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son.”

She said, “How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?”

She was extremely confident, and he told her that he has brought her news that she is pregnant; that she will be bearing a child. She asked how that was possible as no man had even touched her. She actually knew how babies are made.

So that is why it is important to understand that if a person is proposing for you, or if a man is even interested in you, for whatever reason, and wants to meet you and have a chat with you and you feel that it's a good idea, perhaps you should meet with him and evaluate him too. Right?

There are ways of checking out each other, but we have taken this "checking out" to another level altogether. We need to come down a few notches, if you know what I mean.

There was a companion who came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said that he was going to get married. The Prophet (pbuh) asked if he had seen her. He admitted that he hadn't. So he told him "Go and look at her (the woman you are considering marrying) because this will help your time together to be strengthened." [Ahmad]

So, it is recommended that you should go and see; how can you just get married without even seeing her and finding out about each other. That can be done under supervised conditions. The idea is that a man and a woman should not be alone. Because otherwise the third one is who?

Students: *shaytan*

Teacher: Yup - *shaytan*. Rasool Allah (pbuh) said: that if a man and a woman are alone; the third one giving them company is *shaytan* [Sahih Bukhari, Book 25, Number 5403]

Effectively, there must be a chaperon. *Alhamdulillah*, you can get to talk and meet each other and then decide whether you feel that the person is somebody whom you would like to spend your life with. You can perhaps find out more about him and he about you. This may be done through other sources like your family, parents and friends. But the fact is that your fiancé is **not** a *mehram*.

Slide 4:

Celebrities are not free for all; I hope none of you have posters of Justin Beiber in your room. Why is everybody giggling when I say this name? Did I pronounce it wrong?

Student: no

Teacher: so why are you giggling? See, this is what I want to find out. Why are you giggling?

Student: because he is my favorite singer.

Student: same here.

Teacher: so what is there to giggle about?

Student: no, I didn't giggle.

Teacher: no this whole room, it flooded in a giggle. So I don't know about individually but people were giggling, why? I want to know that. We just talked about Maryam (as) and how dignified she was – and I mention the **name** of a celebrity and you guys are giggling!

We are human beings you see. Saying "he is so cute and he is so and so," about a celebrity, is not acceptable. Just like it is not acceptable for boys to drool over girls who happen to be celebrities; it is not right for girls to do that either; drooling over any kind of celebrity.

Student: it is not right to have celebrity crushes?

Teacher: absolutely not.

Student: it's just a crush

Student: isn't it a natural thing that if you see someone good looking, you don't glance again and again, yet your body reacts in way that acknowledges that he's good looking; but that's it.

Teacher: your body goes he's good looking? If your body goes he's good looking, then that's very problematic! Extremely problematic!

Student: you like them for their talent.

Teacher: Celebrities are not free for all, and having crushes on celebrities, no matter how you define a crush, is not ok. It is not ok.

Slide 5 & 6:

Basic rules of engagement or contact rules that we should have with the opposite gender or the opposite sex:

Has a human being – perhaps a religious *mullah* – made up these etiquettes just to spite us? Or better still – “to subjugate women?” No. There is ample evidence in the Qur’an and in the sunnah of our Prophet (pbuh) that tells us how we should behave with the opposite gender.

Slide 7:

Keep a check on your eyes. Allah (swt) has specifically commanded us to lower our gaze.

"And say to the believing women that they should **lower their gaze** and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils all over and not to reveal their adornment except to ... And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers that you may be successful. " (Surah An Noor 24: Verse 31)

Slide 8:

Keep a check on your eyes. Very important. “Eye-candy” business is a terrible idea. It goes against *haya* – which is the defining characteristic of our *deen* – according to Rasool Allah (pbuh).

Rasul Allah (pbuh) said: There are three types of eyes whom hell fire will not touch - the eye which keeps itself shut from the things forbidden by Allah, the eye which guards the frontiers

of Islam and remains open to keep vigil over it and the eye which constantly sheds tears out of Allah's fear. {Tirmidhi}

Slide 9, 10, 11& 12:

And he advised Ali (ra) - Ali! Do not look once after another, for the first look is for you (since it happens accidentally) while the second is against you. {Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi}

Control your body language. That's another problem that exists with a bunch of giggly females; I'm sorry if I'm stereotyping you girls. You go to any mall, and you'll see this bunch of school kids, who are giggling and whispering and doing convoluted acrobatics! It is absolutely gross, undignified and cheap. When you go out with your friends you become like a pack of wolves. Your behavior is like pack behavior, mob behavior so to speak.

The body language speaks volumes; you don't have to say a word. Just by the way you are sitting down or walking about says what you are about – frivolous or no-nonsense.

Ok one of you stand up and show me how would you go and walk in a mall? Come on, seriously.

Yes, be normal that is the whole point. Be normal, be yourself. Sometimes when we become conscious of being “checked-out” or deliberately want to be “checked-out” we start doing very stupid and strange things; the way we walk and the way we sit and use our hands. Don't do that; just be your regular, normal and casual selves.

Student: There's a girl who walks really weird and everyone says that she cat-walks all the time. Before you even meet her or talk to her, you know that she is not a really good girl.

Teacher: Ah! Let's stop right here. Let's not be judgmental about people. This is backbiting sweetie.

Student: but it's an example of the way you make an impression on people by your walk or talk.

Teacher: yes. The way you walk and carry yourself tells so much about you, you don't even have to talk. Your deportment is very important; it should not be frivolous, it should not be cheap, it should not be filmy, right?

Narrated on the authority of Anas bin Malik (ra), the Prophet (pbuh) said:

When lewdness is a part of anything, it becomes defective; and when *haya* is a part of anything it becomes beautiful. (Tirmidhi)

Unfortunately we have got such profound exposure of the media all round us that it affects us in various ways. Sometimes it affects the way we behave, the way we move and the way we interact with people. So control over body language.

See what Allah (swt) is saying in this verse: ... And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment...." (Surah An Noor 24: Verse 31)

Do not draw attention to yourself by the way you walk or through your body language.

Slide 13& 14:

Do not be alone with a *non-mahram*.

I can't emphasise this enough, that the Prophet (pbuh) said that whenever a man is alone with a woman, *shaytan* is the third among them. So do not get yourself in a situation where you are alone with a *non-mehram*, ok. That includes, your tutors, your *maulvi sahib* (Qur'an Teacher) if you have one. Any person who is a *non-mehram* please try your utmost not to be alone with them.

No physical contact at all, with a *non-mehram*. At all! Which includes high fives, or low fives; it is physical contact, isn't it?

Student: a high five? That's just for a few seconds!

Slide 15, 16& 17:

Teacher: Hello! If you high five somebody you touch them, and that's what? Ok, I'm glad that I brought it up. That is physical contact. It says no physical contact, period. Put a period after that. It doesn't mean for a second or even half a second; no physical contact, absolutely none.

The Prophet (pbuh) had no problem declaring in public that the women he selected as his wives were the dearest and fondest beings to him. But he never ever ever touched a *non-mehram* woman. Who was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)? What was his position in society, in Madina?

Most respected fatherly figure. When the Prophet (pbuh) was in Madina and there was this amazing revolution taking place within the Muslims, don't you think he would have been very respected by women and girls? Wouldn't he be? I don't know if you're aware of this, but if anyone became a Muslim, he would take covenant from them which would be called *bayt* and he would hold the hand of the men, but he wouldn't hold the hands of the women. He would just talk to them verbally. He never touched a *non-mehram* woman, never.

Slide 18:

If the president of Iran can do that, so can we. This is the president of Iran standing in a lineup and look what he's doing. This lady has got her hand out and what is he is doing? Is he being rude? He is very politely just bowing. There are times when you girls in school have to go collect an award or something for speech day or something. There may be a male person giving out the award. Is he a *mehram*?

Student: no.



Teacher: should you be shaking hands with him?

Student: no.

Teacher: Muslim women do not shake hands with non-*mehrams*.

I personally know three young students who were given awards in their schools' award ceremony and one guy politely did not shake hands with the lady guest-of-honour who was giving the awards, and these two young girls did not shake hands with gentlemen giving awards. They were not impolite or rude, they bowed, said thank you but did not shake hands!

This is the president of Iran for crying out loud. The sky does not fall. You should stand up for what you believe.

You can just bow and say thank you or courtesy. But you don't have to shake hands with them. Remember that no touching situation. A common touchy situation that we sometimes get ourselves in is with tailors. Are they *mehram*?

Student: No.

Slide 19:

Teacher: what happens when you go and give your *naap* (body measurements)? Can you give your measurements without someone touching you?

Student: no.

Teacher: It is a common touchy situation. Either get someone else to measure you or give a sample or something. There are ways around it. If you have a woman tailor, it's even better. But even if it is a man tailor, I have a man tailor, you don't have to get yourself measured by him.

When you go and buy shoes, a lot of times particularly in our country, this sort of situation may arise; don't do it, just tell them you can put it on yourself. You don't have to have somebody touching your feet. Right?

When you go and buy bangles on Eid, what happens? The person who sells the bangles puts them on for you; why extend your hand, why can't you wear it yourself? *Alhamdulillah*, if you don't do it, that's wonderful. But that is a very common touchy situation okay, leave it alone, wear it yourself.

This also happens when you go and get your ears pierced or for that matter your belly button pierced, or whatever piercing people get done these days. I have actually seen a girl myself, a young woman at a jeweler's where they do piercing, the shop is bam in the middle of a busy shopping center and is open, she was standing there, pulled her shirt up and she was getting her belly button pierced! That is just not on guys.

Even getting your ears pierced by anybody who is not your *mehram* is a no no. In fact I remember I was taking this class somewhere else and they asked me this question; there are

beauty parlors where women pierce your ears. So if anybody wants that contact please ask me and I will *InshaAllah* be happy to share the number with you.

Slide 20:

Getting your hair cut from a man hair dresser or stylist. So yeah he maybe “the” guy to go to but not for you!

Do not “touch” a non-*mehram* – period.

Slide 21:

A woman cannot lead a prayer of mixed congregation. Absolutely no way. You must not be in front of or alongside a man while praying and that includes your younger brother. You cannot stand next to your brother, or in front of your brother even if he is five years old when you are praying. Please make sure that you are a little bit behind. Whether it's your dad, whether it's your brother, whether it's any man, you must be a little behind them.

Student: only at home or in *jam'at* (congregation)

Teacher: Period. In *jam'at* or anywhere, you cannot. The prayer of man and a woman will not be valid. Both of their prayers will not be valid. Please try to understand one thing over here; I know you're going to ask me about the *Kaaba* and Hajj. That is a different situation. Sometimes people ask what about *Kaaba* and in the *haram*. If you notice, because I've been to the *haram* at Hajj as well as for *umrah*. During Hajj sometimes segregating like that is impossible because of the rush. Yet those men and women who are sort of managing the crowd, they try their level best to arrange things such that the women pray at the back and the men at the front. But sometimes people start fighting over it so it's not worth it. But at other times, in *umrah* particularly, they specifically have sections and if you go there please do not argue over that because that is the right thing to do.

As Muslim women we must realize that our relationship with Allah (swt) is what is important here. Your frame of reference is not your relationship with a man, your frame of reference is your relationship with Allah (swt). Do you understand that?

All this is 'Women's' lib'; all this business about why can't I just sit together and pray, and why can't I stand together. All that will get sorted out if you just try to think of it in these terms, that if Allah (swt) has given me this commandment it must be for my own good. Okay. If you are a little confused about it we can most certainly talk about it a little bit more. But you understand what I'm trying to say here. Is anybody confused about what I'm trying to say here?

If your frame of reference is always a man then you go that way of women's liberation that you see over here; the idea that sitting together and praying and leading a congregation for women should be allowed. No, that is not how we look at ourselves as Muslim women. We look at ourselves with relation to whom? To our Creator. So the Creator has created two

genders, complimenting each other; the roles of the genders are different. That is why their functions are different as well.

Just like if there is a car, the different parts have different functions, right? The steering wheel and there is the tire and the engine, various different things; you can't replace one with the other. Can you steer the car with the engine and have the steering wheel do the engine's job instead? Will the car be functional? It won't happen. So it's just very simple if you look at it from a very logical and a god-conscious angle. Really. So that's another thing; you must not be in front of or alongside a man when praying and regardless if that man is your *mehram* or non *mehram*.

*InshaAllah* we will continue our discussion next week. We will look at a beautiful example of a girl/guy relationship from the Qur'an. Do have your questions ready.

Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam 'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*